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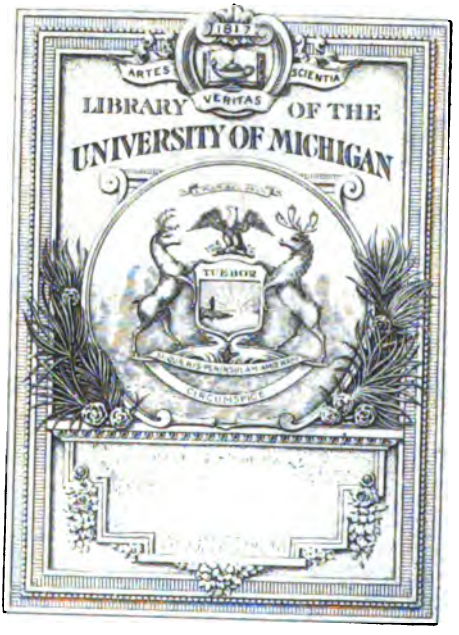

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THE

WISDOM OF THE APOCALYPSE

9145-8.

BY

J. Hall McILVAINE

AUTHOR OF "THE WISDOM OF HOLY SCRIPTURE"

Ὧδε ἡ σοφία.

REV. xiii. 18.

NEW YORK

ANSON D. F. RANDOLPH & COMPANY

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PREFACE

Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written therein, for the time is near.—REV. i. 3.

THIS surely ought to be an all-constraining motive to the study of the Apocalypse, and all-sufficient evidence that it was intended to be understood. Yet hitherto, as is well known, it has been almost as a sealed book to multitudes of God's dear children. Hence the aim of the present work is to render it intelligible, interesting, and edifying, not only to scholars, but also and no less to plain and simple-minded readers. The author has not been discouraged by previous failures, because, as it seems to him, they were the inevitable consequence of erroneous views of the general character and object of the book, namely, that it was mainly intended to represent historical events, whereas, according to the view here taken, it represents truths, ideas,—and events in so far only as they exemplify these ideas. Consequently many of his interpretations are entirely new, such as those of the First Seal, the Fifth and Sixth Trumpets, and the Two Witnesses; and almost all of them are more or less different from any that have ever before been given. He has been guided also by the following clews: 1. Interpretations of the leading symbols by the Apocalyptist himself, some of which have hitherto been strangely overlooked, as in the case of the First Seal; 2. References to other places in the Bible where the same symbols occur, and where their meaning is either given or easily determined; 3. Consistency, the symbols being almost constantly used each in the same sense, and varying only as they are intended to reflect different shades of the same ideas; 4. Analogy between the natural

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and spiritual worlds, such as underlies the Lord's parables, and all other Scriptural images. The author's special qualification for his work is what may be called a lifelong study and practice in the interpretation of the symbols of the Jewish, Christian, Hindoo, Greek, Roman, with more or less of the Egyptian, Scandinavian, and other religions. For correction of the Greek text he has relied chiefly upon the critical labors of Dean Alford, the Revisers of the New Testament, and the Rev. Dr. Craven in Lange's Commentary, which last can hardly be overestimated. He submits to Biblical Greek scholars his rendering of the text in the few cases where it differs from preceding translations, as in the word ἐσφαγμένον (Rev. v. 6). In order to keep the work within readable limits, he has been constrained to exclude a multitude of details and side-issues, which will suggest themselves to intelligent readers, and to diverge as little as possible from the main stream of light which the Apocalypse pours upon the ocean of God's purposes, government, and providence, the history of the church and the world, and the final triumph of good over evil. He has seldom thought it necessary to refer by name to the few authors from whom he has quoted. In fine, the work is so unlike everything hitherto published on the subject that he is not without hope of its attracting the attention of those who are competent to judge of its merits and defects, and that so it may prove the more helpful to many who love the Sacred Oracles.

NEWARK N. J., 1886.

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I

AUTHORSHIP AND CHARACTER OF THE WORK REASONS FOR THE STUDY OF IT I 1–3

In the title and proem which the author has prefixed to this work, he has given us as many and as strong reasons for the study of it as could well be crowded into so few words. To these, therefore, we ought to give some patient attention, in order especially to obviate that general prejudice against it which has arisen from its supposed obscurity, and which has led the Church of England to omit it almost entirely from her public readings. For, in the words of one of her most eminent clergymen, "Not one of the precious messages of the Spirit to the churches is ever heard in the public services of a church never weary of appealing to her Scriptural liturgies."

THE REVELATION OF [SAINT] JOHN [THE DIVINE]

The first of these reasons is contained in its title, which informs us that St. John was its author. But the words in brackets are not found in the oldest and best manuscripts, nor do we know by whom they were first applied to this apostle to distinguish him as pre-eminent in that knowledge of God and divine things which the work discloses. For 'Divine' here signifies theologian, as we say of any eminent clergyman, He is a learned and pious divine. That the beloved disciple of our Lord, however, was the author of the Apocalypse, seems to admit of no reasonable doubt, for in the primitive church, so far as we know, this was never called in question, except by some errorists who rejected almost all the other books of the New Testament, and this one, of course, along with the rest. With this exception, it was

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ascribed to St. John by all who mentioned it, until about the close of the third century, when its authorship began to be questioned by some, but only on account of certain doctrines which it was supposed to teach. Such objections, of course, can have no weight against the unanimous consent of the first ages, confirmed, as it is, by many peculiar forms of expression which are found also in St. John's Gospel and Epistles. These wonderful prophecies, therefore, having been delivered to the church by the most intimate companion and beloved disciple of our blessed Lord, to say nothing here of their plenary inspiration, of which we shall find abundant evidences, are to be diligently and prayerfully studied by all who profess and call themselves Christians.

1 The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to show unto His servants what things must shortly come to pass.

Another such reason we have in the primary origin and character of the book. For here it is declared to be a revelation of or from Jesus Christ, which God gave to Him that He might show unto His servants future events which were soon to take place. The word "revelation," however, has a more comprehensive and profound meaning than as limited to prediction, and hence we call the whole Scripture by this name, as being the grand disclosure which God has given of Himself and of the spiritual world. Yet it is to be observed that this book is the only one of the Sacred Canon which is so called by the authority of divine inspiration, which seems to imply that it is pre-eminently such; and this we shall find strikingly confirmed and illustrated as we proceed in the study of it. For certainly there is no other portion of Holy Scripture, unless we except the apocalyptic visions of the prophet Daniel, between which and these of St. John there is a close connection and resemblance in many particulars, which contains such wonderful disclosures, not only of the future history of the church and the world, but also of the secret purposes and providence of God in general; or which brings out into such full and clear manifestation the invisible spiritual powers and agencies by which these purposes

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are realized. Even where representations wholly symbolical are employed, this unveiling of supernatural agencies and transactions is still the grand characteristic of the book, and that which gives it its distinctive name, the Apocalypse, or Revelation, which signifies literally the Unveiling. For where to our natural eyes are visible only Christian churches engaged in more or less strenuous conflict with sin and corruption in themselves and in the world around them, the divinely illumined eye of our Seer discerns, and his glowing word-pictures enable us to see, our Lord himself walking in the midst of them, and holding their angels in His right hand. Where we see only war, pestilence, and famine, He is here revealed sending forth these scourges upon mankind to punish them for their sin of rebellion against His authority in order to subdue them unto Himself. Where we see only diseases and sufferings from natural causes, we are here given to behold "the angel of the abyss" opening it, and letting loose spiritual agents in the smoke of its torment to inflict them. Where we see only calamities and sorrows of various kinds, here we are shown the souls of the martyrs under the altar of burnt sacrifice crying to God that their blood may be avenged and their cause vindicated. In fine, where we see only a great missionary work like that of the first ages, or that which is now going on to its consummation, we have here a mighty spiritual agency unveiled urging it onwards, "an angel flying in midheaven having the everlasting gospel to preach to every nation and tongue and tribe and people" (Rev. xiv. 6). A hundred similar examples might easily be given. Thus, in a truly wonderful manner, this book unveils the spiritual world, especially those transactions of which the events which take place here below are, as it were, the shadows which they cast upon the veil of sense in which we are enclosed. Hence we see that these unveilings are the counterpart, so to speak, of faith defined as "the substance of things hoped for, and the realization of things not seen" (Heb. xi. 1), for the confirmation and perfecting of which, therefore, they ought to be diligently studied.

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1 And He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John.

We meet with a difficulty here from the fact, that some of these revelations were communicated by the Lord in person, and others by several different angels. For the solution of it we may take the word 'angel' as a noun of multitude including all those by whom the disclosures were made, even the Lord himself, as the great 'Angel of the covenant' (Mal. iii. 1). It is of much more importance, however, to consider the word 'signified,' because it expresses the symbolical character of the whole book, which claims, at the outset, a careful examination. But here, and elsewhere occasionally, I must refer to a previous work in which I have attempted to show that symbols are the least inadequate and highest forms in which the truths of the spiritual world can be represented.* Indeed, it seems worthy of a more full consideration than it has ever yet received, that all the religions of mankind have sought to express their deepest mysteries in symbolical forms. The universality of this fact is all the evidence we need that its cause must lie deep in the original principles of human nature. It is true that some would account for it by the supposition of priestcraft, seeking to veil its ideas in order that the power and influence of superior knowledge might be confined to the initiated; nor can it be denied that symbolical representations have been perverted to serve this base purpose; but it does not follow that they have no higher origin than the knavery of priests, and no better use than to keep the common people in ignorance and awe. For the truth is, that they originate spontaneously from the same cause that gives birth to articulate speech and language in general, i. e. from the energy of thought, seeking to embody itself to sense, that it may communicate itself to other minds. Fulness of thought craves expression, and that, in sensuous forms. Ideas incessantly strive after incarnation. Being constituted by a vital synthesis of a spiritual and a material nature, we are powerfully affected by that only which is com-

* *The Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, xvii.

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posed of what may be called soul and body, substance and form, spirit and letter. As body without soul, form without substance, letter without spirit, is dead, in like manner, soul without body, substance without form, spirit without letter, is a lifeless abstraction. In all men there is an instinctive feeling that mere ideas and abstractions are incomplete and almost powerless until they are realized in sensible forms. Hence that striving to realize ideals which has given us all our great works of art, an Iliad, a Phidian Zeus, a Venus di Melo, an Apollo Belvidere, a Strasburg cathedral, for these are all symbols.

A symbol, then, may be comprehensively defined as a representation of ideas to the senses, and more narrowly, to the sight, which is the noblest of the senses. Of the latter kind are most of the symbols of this book, which, consequently, have a vividness and power such as no other forms of expression can ever attain. But this is a point of such importance to the right understanding of these visions that it requires to be somewhat copiously illustrated.

It is well known, then, that the fervid life of the ancient Romans was due, in great part, to their genius for war and conquest, which probably has never been equalled, and certainly never surpassed. Hence their idea of virtue was expressed by the word *virtus*, valor, as if this one virtue included all others. In fact, it was generally believed by those iron republicans that Rome was invincible; that but one result was ever to be anticipated of the wars in which she might be engaged; that her enemies themselves must expect to be conquered; that other peoples in comparison were as beasts made to be subjugated. Possessed with these ideas, they could not fail to symbolize them, as they did, in an immense variety of visible forms, such as the following: (1) The place where they gave audience to foreign ambassadors who came to treat of war and peace was the temple of the goddess of victory: (2) Immediately after their disastrous defeat by Hannibal at Cannæ, which brought the republic to the verge of ruin, they sold in the market-place at Rome for its full value the ground upon which his victorious army was

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then encamped: (3) They sometimes erected upon the battle-field an immense structure in the form of a yoke for beasts of burden, under which they marched the conquered army, thus compelling them, as they expressed it, to pass under the yoke. What words, what bulletins of victory, could have had anything like the vividness and power of this tremendous symbol!

As a modern example we may take the Russian coat of arms: a double-headed eagle, a crown on each head surmounted by another great crown, holding in his talons a globe and a sceptre under a cross, having emblazoned upon his breast an armed and mounted warrior. This now is the symbol of that colossal military power of the north which, standing at the summit of the two great continents of the earth, Europe and Asia, looks down over each of them with a crowned head, to signify that its destiny is to rule both. The two heads, looking in opposite directions, but meeting in one body, the two crowns surmounted by the great crown, and the single sceptre, denote that these two divisions of the earth are to be consolidated in one empire, monarchy, or despotism; the globe in the eagle's talons, that it is ultimately to include the whole world; and the cross, that Christianity is to be its religion. The armed and mounted warrior represents the Cossack cavalry, formerly the most numerous and best in the world, upon which Russia long relied for the realization of these sublime ideas and purposes. This powerful symbol, which has grown up out of the life of the Slavic people, whilst for a long time they have been moving into ascendency among the nations, emblazons these ideas before their eyes, fires their hearts with the corresponding sentiments, and thus exerts a mighty influence to mould their national character. Hence it is said that there are few among them who do not confidently expect that Russia will one day become the mistress of the world.

Thus we see that symbolical representations to the sense of sight have a vividness, fulness, and power vastly superior to all other modes of expression; and this is the reason why the Sacred Scriptures are full of them. Hence 'the tree of

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life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil' in the garden of Eden; also the rainbow designated as the visible sign of God's covenant that the world should never again be destroyed by a flood. Hence, when He would touch to the quick the heart of man, He so often appeared in visible form, as 'the Angel of the covenant,' to Abraham and the other patriarchs, to Moses in the burning bush, to the prophets in their visions, and finally as 'the Man Christ Jesus.' In like manner, the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord at His baptism was symbolized by a dove descending from heaven and resting upon Him; and the same gift to His disciples at Pentecost was represented by tongues of fire upon their heads. Subsequently also He showed himself visibly to Saul of Tarsus, when He called that persecutor of the church to be one of His apostles, and to His beloved disciple in the visions of this book. Indeed, His true church has continued ever since to be His visible body, a perpetual incarnation of Himself and of the truths of His gospel; for these truths, wheresoever the church ceases to be a body for their visible manifestation, are as powerless to save the world as the ideas of Plato, or any other philosophy. In truth, the great object of her existence is, that she may be a perpetual incarnation of the invisible and personal Word and of all that He has taught, through which He may manifest himself as life to the world.

In fine, the importance which He himself attaches to such 'sensible signs' is evinced by the pains He has taken to symbolize the most fundamental truths of His gospel in the sacraments of the church. For Baptism addresses itself to the three most important of our senses, sight, hearing, and feeling; and the washing with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost signifies the cleansing of our souls from the defilement of sin by the blood of Christ, and our resurrection from death in sin unto the new life of holiness by the power of the Triune God in whose name we are baptised. In the Eucharist, which addresses itself to all our five senses, the bread broken and the wine poured, being given and received as food and drink, signify that the Lord gave His body to be

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broken and His blood to be shed for us; that, as thus crucified for us, He gives himself unto us; that we by faith receive Him into our souls; that, so received, He becomes our life; and our eating and drinking together at the same table signifies that we partake of this life in common, that we belong to one family, and are brothers and sisters to each other. Now these truths are the very heart of His gospel; and for this reason obviously He took such pains to symbolize them in these holy ordinances, in order that they might be kept ever fresh and living in our minds and hearts, and might be in and for us a perpetual life-renewing power.

The preceding views, in which this interesting subject is only glanced at, may enable us to understand, in part at least, why our blessed Lord saw fit to embody in symbolical forms, and present to the eye of His servant John, to be communicated to His church in these wonderful word-pictures, the truths of this book. And the symbols themselves offer us one of the strongest reasons we could have to study them with prayerful diligence. For unless we perceive something of their meaning, they are altogether profitless; but, being understood, they, like the sacraments, have a quickening power above all other forms in which the truths of the spiritual world can be expressed. Moreover, for the interest of this study, we have here a wealth of symbolism which, it is safe to say, is unrivaled in the literature of the world, which far surpasses all the other Scriptures, although the apocalyptic visions of some of the Old Testament prophets may fitly be compared with it. Indeed, it seems as if there was hardly anything known to man which is not levied upon to enrich the symbolism of this wonderful book. Heaven, earth, and hell freely contribute to it. Sun, moon, stars, sky, air, clouds, storms, rain, snow, hail, winds, the rainbow, thunder and lightning; mountains, wildernesses, earthquakes, the sea and the creatures in it, islands, rivers, streams, fountains; gold, silver, iron, stones, marble, precious stones, ivory, pearls; trees, leaves, grass, vines, wheat, barley, flour, wine, oil, cinnamon, frankincense and other spices; horses, oxen, sheep, lambs, lions, leopards, bears, serpents, locusts, eagles and

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other birds of prey; creatures not found in nature, but represented for symbolical purposes; shepherds, artizans, merchants, merchandise, ships, sailors, chariots, garments, linen, beds, books, girdles, swords, bows, crowns, measuring reeds, weighing scales; cities, foundations, walls, gates, streets, temples, pillars, altars, lamps, torches; geometrical figures, measurements, numbers; colors, white, black, scarlet, purple, blue, green, yellow, pale; the human organism, head, hair, eyes, mouth, breast, hands and feet; day and night, light and darkness, cold and heat, sacrifice, blood, fire, smoke, life and death; man and woman, bridegroom and bride, husband and wife, parents and children; nations, tribes, languages, kings, subjects, citizens: and even this is a very incomplete enumeration of the symbols by which the Lord signified to His beloved disciple the manifold and sublime truths of this wonderful book.

Moreover, the special knowledge which is manifested in this vast range of symbolism would seem to be nothing less than miraculous, for no one has ever pretended to detect an error in any of the allusions made to these or other objects in nature, art, or life. With the sole exception of 'the parting asunder of the heaven and the falling of the stars,' which, as we shall see, may be consistently understood, all things are spoken of just as we speak of them now: and who but a skilful lapidary could have given such an orderly enumeration of the twelve jewels in the foundation of the New Jerusalem? In this respect, no human production, which has anything like such a vast range, can be compared with the Apocalypse. For Shakespeare himself often errs in his allusions and statements for want of special knowledge, as, e. g. where he makes a gross fat man, who has been thrown into the water, say, "You may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking"; whereas the fatter a man is, the easier it is for him to float or swim. Now whatever view we take of the Scriptures in general, whether they speak of natural objects with scientific rigor, or in loose popular language, this unerring conformity of the Apocalypse to nature in its allusions to such an infinite number and variety of objects must surely be taken as one of the many evidences of

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that plenary inspiration, even in its words, which it alone, of all the books in the Bible, claims for itself. This, then, is another reason why it should be carefully studied.

2 Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, whatsoever things he saw.

The meaning of these somewhat obscure expressions seems to be: I John have here and throughout this book borne faithful and true witness that it is the word of God, and given my testimony unto Jesus Christ, that He did manifest himself unto me as here represented, and that I did see what I have here recorded as seen by me: in all which we have a strong confirmation of the plenary inspiration of the book, and of that reason for studying it.

3 Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written therein, for the time is near.

This blessing gives the crowning reason. It refers to the office of reader in the primitive church, and to the people assembled to hear the word, when so few could read for themselves, and fewer still could afford to own the costly sacred manuscripts. It is pronounced upon the reader and hearer alike, provided they should keep the things written in the book; i. e. should receive them as the word of God, lay them to heart, and live accordingly: for all which a special motive is given in the words, 'for the time is near'; but these, along with the preceding 'things which must shortly come to pass,' are not to be strictly taken, for it is quite certain that these unveilings refer in part to what was then present, in part to past events, and for the most part only to the future; and, with respect to the nearness of the time in which these last should take place, since many of them are yet to come, it must be understood in that large prophetic sense in which 'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (2 Pet. iii. 8).

It is evident, moreover, from this blessing upon the readers and hearers of the book, that it must be intelligible to all earnest seekers after the truth of God; and such, I am per-

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suaded, we shall find it. For notwithstanding its symbolical character, whence that obscurity of which so many complain, it is by no means so difficult of interpretation as has been commonly supposed. For its leading symbols, upon which everything depends, are clearly interpreted for us, either by the Lord in person, or by angels, or by the Apocalyptist himself; and each symbol is used throughout in one and the same fundamental sense, with such variations only as are intended to reflect different shades of the same idea, so that their meaning, when obscure, may almost always be elicited by comparison with their use in different connections. Also, the allusions to well understood symbols and prophecies in the other Scriptures are so frequent and explanatory that, where other means of interpretation fail, the sense may commonly be drawn from them with reasonable certainty. Hence I venture to maintain that the book, in its general import, its spiritual aims, its grand moral ideas, and its outlines of the providential history of the church and the world, is intelligible; and I shall try to show that it can be made exceedingly interesting and edifying to the plainest readers. The disappointment which so many experience arises in great part from their unreasonable curiosity. They would know for certain who is antichrist, when he is to appear, when and where the great battle of Harmageddon shall be fought, why Satan, after having been chained and locked up in prison for a thousand years, must be set at liberty again to deceive the nations, and when the final consummation will take place. But, with respect to all such things, we ought to be deeply imbued with the spirit of our Lord's admonitions: "Of that day and hour knoweth no one, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only (Mark xiii. 32). It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority" (Acts i. 7). Nor, indeed, would it have been possible for us to comprehend the forms and particulars of the future if they had been ever so clearly revealed, for our minds are a growth, and are nourished by the experience of events as they occur. We can never bridge the ocean which lies between us, at any

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given stage of our progress, and the distant future, even by the aid of any conceivable revelation. These visions were not intended to disclose what, from the very nature of the case, could not be understood, nor to gratify any prurient curiosity. One whole series of these revelations to St. John, that of the seven thunders (Rev. x. 4), had to be sealed up from us, probably for the reason that we could not bear it. We may be sure that whatever in this book was intended to be plain, is plain; and that the blessing here promised is attainable by all who will seek it diligently with an humble mind and a prayerful spirit. The substance and spirit in these revelations are as clear as in any other part of the word of God; and it is substance and spirit that we need for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace. We ought not, therefore, to be deterred from this study by any obscurity we may meet with, nor by any other cause, especially as these disclosures are of such immense importance that they cannot be neglected without immeasurable loss. We might as well turn away our eyes from the overspreading heavens, because we cannot measure nor weigh the sun, moon, and stars, nor determine their distances from each other, nor calculate their times and motions, though it remains as true now as of old, for the little child as for the astronomer, that

> The heavens declare the glory of God;
> And the firmament showeth His handy work (Ps. xix. 1).

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II

GREETING DOXOLOGY THEME I 4–7

We come now to the author's greeting to the churches, followed by a glowing doxology, and by the announcement of the theme or subject of the book, which is the Coming of the Lord; and a declaration is appended as a seal that it is God himself who makes this announcement.

4 John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you and peace from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come; and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne; 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

These churches will be particularly enumerated hereafter, when we shall see why there were just seven of them, and with what pregnant significance the work is inscribed and addressed to them. 'Grace and peace' include all the blessings of the gospel, both temporal and spiritual. They proceed from Him who is their original source, who is and was and is to come, in allusion to the great and venerable name, Jehovah, the meaning of which is 'I am He who is' (Ex. iii. 14), implying His eternity, immutability, and all His other incommunicable attributes. In the words, 'who is to come,' there may be some allusion to the theme of the book, for we shall find that when the Lord is spoken of as having already come they are omitted.

But who are these seven Spirits that are before His throne? This question requires us to give some attention here to the meaning of the number seven, which occupies a very prominent place in this book. For we have seven golden candlesticks or light-bearers, seven stars, seven churches, their seven angels, seven other angels, their seven trumpets, seven others still, their seven golden vials or chalices, seven seals, seven thunders, seven plagues, seven Spirits of God, seven heads,

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seven eyes, seven horns, seven mountains, seven kings, seven crowns. Even this enumeration is incomplete, for the word occurs about fifty times. Moreover, the book contains seven distinct series of revelations, and each of these is sevenfold, although this does not so plainly appear in the last two: (1) The seven churches, (2) the seven-sealed book or roll, (3) the seven trumpets, (4) the seven thunders, (5) the seven last plagues, (6) the series commencing with Babylon as a harlot, (7) that of the New Jerusalem. Hence some commentators would interpret the work as representing seven successive stages in the history of the church and the world; but no two of them agree upon the events included in these divisions; and thus the whole book has become enveloped in such obscurity as upon this theory cannot be cleared up. But the ablest expositors treat these different series as often overlapping upon each other, and each of them, except the last, as covering a great part of this dispensation, sometimes, indeed, as reaching back into the preceding. Yet we shall find that there is more or less of succession and progress up to the crowning result. One thing, however, is evident from this frequent use of the number, namely, that it must be understood with reference to its well known mystical or symbolical meaning, which is that of perfection, and as often implying unity in variety.

Here, then, in the mysterious expression, 'the seven Spirits who are before His throne,' we need not hesitate to recognize the symbolical import of this number, nor to understand the words as signifying the Holy Spirit in the unity of His personality and in the fulness of His manifold operations, i. e. in all His perfections. He is represented as 'before the throne' apparently to denote that mysterious distinction between God and His Spirit which runs through the whole Scripture, and which we, in default of a better word, call one of personality. Probably, also, there is here an allusion to the number seven of the churches to which the messages of the Spirit are addressed. This interpretation is abundantly confirmed by the following parallel passages: "A Lamb . . having seven horns aud seven eyes, which are the seven

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Spirits of God" (Rev. v. 6); for what can this mean but that the Lamb possesses the fulness of the Holy Spirit? for "God giveth not the Spirit by measure [unto Him]" (John iii. 34). In one of the following Epistles, also, it is said: "Thus saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God" (Rev. iii. 1–13); and at its close: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"; where 'the Spirit' and 'the seven Spirits' are evidently equivalent expressions.

The 'grace and peace' are also from 'Jesus Christ,' which evinces that the greeting is equivalent to the apostolic benediction from the Father, Son, and Spirit, the triune source of salvation and all blessings. Here, moreover, the Lord is called 'the faithful witness,' or martyr, for the word is the same, in allusion to His declaration before Pilate: "For this was I born, and for this came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" (John xix. 37); to which St. Paul refers in the words: "Jesus Christ, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession" (1 Tim. vi. 13). He is also 'the firstborn of the dead,' in the sense of the statement: "Now is Christ risen from the dead, the firstfruits of them that sleep" (1 Cor. xv. 20); not, indeed, as having been raised up the first in time, but upon whose resurrection that of His people depends. In fine, He is called 'the prince of the kings of the earth,' because, according to the whole Scripture, He is the head of all civil government, the Lord paramount over the rulers of all the nations, from whom all their lawful powers are derived, which, therefore, ought ever to be exercised in His name. We shall have a large development of this idea in these visions, where we shall see the nations represented as in rebellion because they do not acknowledge His authority, and that His coming is with great judgments upon them for their subjugation to their true allegiance.

5 Unto Him that loveth us, and hath washed us from our sins in His blood, 6 and hath made us a kingdom [and] priests unto God and His Father, unto Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever, amen.

This doxology ascribes all glory and dominion to the Lord Jesus on the ground of His most holy sacrifice, by the blood

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or efficacy of which He cleanses us from our sins, and on the ground of His love for us, moved by which He freely gave Himself to death on our behalf. Here, then, we have the most fundamental principle of the gospel, and we shall find it constantly referred to and emphasized in all these revelations, especially in the symbol of the Lamb. Having thus cleansed us, and loving us with an inalienable love, He delights to honor us. Hence He has made us 'a kingdom' over which He reigns, and 'priests' in the worship of His Father, in fulfilment of the prophecies: "Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex. xix. 6). Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood . . a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices." (1 Pet. ii. 5–9). It agrees with the past and present tenses here used, that this kingdom has been already set up, rather than, as some think, that it will commence at the millennium. But the nature of this kingdom, whether it be visible and temporal, or altogether spiritual, is much disputed, and we shall have to examine this question hereafter. At all events, it will continue 'forever and ever,' which words literally signify 'unto the ages of the ages'; but, since they are here and elsewhere used to express the duration of the Lord's dominion and glory, and sometimes even that of God's life, there is no doubt about their meaning.

7 Behold, He cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see Him, and they who pierced Him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him; even so, amen.

According to all the interpreters this is the announcement of the theme of the book. The clouds with or in which the Lord is represented as coming, whether literal or not, are doubtless the symbol of the inscrutableness of His judgments and manifestations of Himself:

> Clouds and darkness are round about Him;
> Righteousness and judgment are the foundation of His throne (Ps. xcvii. 2).

Here also it is declared that this manifestation of Himself will be universal, and the cause of a universal mourning, men beating their breasts for anguish, for that meaning is contained in the word. Yet this mourning will not be alto-

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gether that of obdurate impenitence; in part, at least, it will be a gracious and penitential sorrow, as in the prophecy alluded to: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one is in bitterness for his firstborn" (Zech. xii. 10). As for the finally impenitent, who, in the Lord's parables, are the goats on His left hand, the foolish virgins, the tares among the wheat, the wayside thorny and stony ground hearers of the word, who, by the sun of His coming, which quickens the seed in the good ground, are scorched and withered, their mourning must needs be 'the sorrow of the world that worketh death' (2 Cor. vii. 10). 'Even so, amen.' It is most just and right that it should be so; for it would not be right that the grace and mercy of the Lord should be forever rejected and despised, that His blood should be forever trampled on, that despite should be forever done to the Holy Spirit, and all this with impunity.

But, now, whether the Lord's Coming is to be understood as personal and visible, or invisible and spiritual; whether it will precede or follow the millennium; to establish His kingdom on earth, or to judge the world at the last day; whether it is one particular manifestation, or includes a series or succession of events: upon these points there is great diversity of opinion. Those who hold to one personal and visible advent previous to the millennium make a strong case from the prophecies on the subject: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like unto the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven. . . . And there was given unto Him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him (Dan. vii. 13–14). Then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, when they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Mat. xxiv. 30). This Jesus, who has been received up into heaven, shall so come in like man-

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ner as ye have beheld Him going into heaven (Acts i. 11). Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Mat. xxvi. 64). These are only a few of a great many prophecies, from which it is claimed that the future coming of the Lord will be personal, visible, and pre-millennial.

But this interpretation is encumbered with very great difficulties, and such as constrain other interpreters, more numerous and, to say the least, of equal ability, to maintain that "Christ is said to come in the clouds as often as He manifests His glory and majesty in extraordinary effects of His grace, severity, and power, and shows Himself as present to His church." This comprehensive view, it is claimed, conforms to the analogy of other prophetic deliverances, where one prediction includes a succession of events, as in the words of God to Moses: "I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren like unto thee, and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Deut. xviii. 18). For this prediction began to be fulfilled in the next prophet after Moses, and it ran on to a more and more complete fulfilment in every one that followed, whom God raised up in Israel during 1500 years, until it culminated in Christ, of whom, in allusion to it, the people said: "Of a truth this is the prophet that cometh into the world" (John vi. 14). It is maintained, also, that this view is the only one that is consistent with many declarations concerning the Lord's coming, which are quite as explicit as any that can be cited on the other side, and which cannot be otherwise understood than as referring to a series of events in which He does not personally or visibly appear. For both He and His disciples speak of it as if it included the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, as where they called His attention to the magnificence and beauty of the temple, and He answered them: "Verily, I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down"; whereupon they said: "Tell us when these things shall be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world"

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(Mat. xxiv. 2–3). In like manner, He refers to the gift of His Spirit at Pentecost as a form of His coming: "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, that He may be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth. . . . I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you" (John xiv. 16–18). In the same way He seems to speak of our departure out of this life: "In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you: and . . I will come again, and take you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also" (xiv. 2–3); in connection with which we should recall His words to the dying thief: "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (Luke xxiii. 43). Moreover, this idea seems to be contained in His repeated admonitions to be ever on the watch for His coming: "Be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh (Mat. xxiv. 42). Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour" (Mat. xxv. 13). For these admonitions, as referring to our decease, have the greatest pertinency and force, but, as having in view exclusively His coming at the millennium, or the end of the world, they seem to be nearly pointless, and even misleading; for with what simplicity, or even sincerity, could He tell His disciples to be always in expectation of that which was not to take place for thousands of years? Besides, when asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered: "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation, neither shall they say, Lo here, or there, for, lo, the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 20–21). Finally, He declared several times that His coming should take place in the lifetime of some who heard Him: "Verily I say unto you, there be some of them that stand here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom (Mat. xvii. 28). This generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished" (Mat. xxiv. 14). In view of all this, and of much that will appear in the sequel, it seems plain to me that the Coming of the Lord must be taken as a symbolical expression including a series or succession of events, in which He manifests His power and glory, but does not always personally or visibly

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appear: which, however, may be crowned at last by one grand event in which He may appear in person, and literally 'every eye shall see Him.' But whether this manifestation will precede or follow the millennium, must be left for future consideration.

This comprehensive view seems quite natural when we understand upon what principle these diverse events are thus grouped together, and included under one and the same expression. For there is a common element running through them all, which is nothing less than the judgment of God upon the evil that is in the world, in consequence of which one of them often becomes a type of another. Hence the destruction of Jerusalem, in which so many perished amidst unparalleled horrors, became a grand historic type of the end of the world, and of the fate of the wicked when their day of grace shall come to an end. The element of judgment is contained also in the death of every individual, inasmuch as 'death came into the world by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned' (Rom. v. 12). In like manner, the coming of the Holy Spirit is always with judgment, as in the Lord's words: "When He is come, He will convict the world of sin, of justice, and of judgment" (John xvi. 8). The final coming of the Lord, as all understand, will be at the judgment of the great day, when all the dead shall stand before His 'great white throne,' and receive 'according to their works' (Rev. xx. 11–15).

For these reasons, and others which will be given hereafter, I understand the theme of this book, here enunciated as the Coming of the Lord, to include His manifestations of Himself throughout the whole of this dispensation, in great judgments upon the evil that is in the world, and in great works of grace and salvation, such as those which we call revivals of religion: especially because, with this understanding, and not without it, I can feel the force of those frequent admonitions which are given us to be always 'ready, waiting, looking, watching, praying for, loving, and hastening unto, His appearing.' Thus also we shall find, as surely we ought, the subject of the book in every part of it, and not fall into

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the inconsistency of those who do not find it anywhere except in the closing visions.

Such being the theme of the book, it is developed under twofold general and special relations: on the one hand, to the Lord and His kingdom, its friends and supporters, the unfallen angels, the church and redeemed people of God; on the other, to Satan and his kingdom, the fallen angels, rebellious nations, kingdoms, governments, and ungodly sinners of mankind. Hence the work has a highly dramatic character, representing that mysterious and awful conflict which has raged from time immemorial between the powers of good and evil both in the natural and spiritual worlds. Out of these complex relations, moreover, the subject is evolved, if I may so speak, with unrivaled vividness and power. Hence we have scenes in heaven, where we behold the celestial Intelligences engaged in the worship and service of God, animated, at the same time, with the liveliest interest and sympathy for the church on earth and her persecuted people, whom they watch over and protect, inflicting the most appalling judgments upon their enemies and persecutors. In other scenes, Satan and his angels are brought into view, exerting all their tremendous malignity and power to overwhelm and destroy the saints. But, although permitted to bring upon them dire temptations and afflictions, yet, through the watchfulness and interposition of the heavenly powers, they never succeed; their subtlety and malice are always frustrated, and made to return upon their own heads, until they are finally routed, driven off the field, and shut up in hell. In still other scenes, the nations and their rulers come into conflict with the Lord and His saints, in which they also are defeated, and made partakers of the judgments and punishment of the spiritual world of evil with which they have identified themselves. And the sacred drama reaches its denouement when the Lord's people, having been purified by the fiery sea of trials through which they have passed, enter into 'the city which hath the foundations, whose architect and builder is God' (Heb. xi. 10), where He wipes away every tear from their eyes, and they rejoice forever in the presence of their all-conquering King and Saviour.

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In fine, there are few passages, even in the Holy Scriptures, which for sublimity and grandeur can be compared with these revelations concerning the Lord's coming. One of these is the account of the creation, of the innocence, sin, and fall of man, and therein of the origin of evil in this world. Another is the history of the incarnation, life, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ: His eternal purpose to save sinners by the sacrifice of Himself; His leaving 'the glory which He had with the Father before the world was' (John xvii. 5); His birth of a virgin; His meekness and resignation; His prayer on the cross for His murderers; His cry of spiritual desolation, which darkened the sun, and caused the earth to tremble through all her marble bones; His last words of faith and trust: "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke xxiii. 46): in all history there is no sublimity equal to this, unless it be in these unveilings of heaven, earth, and hell which are given us in the Apocalypse of St. John the Divine.

8 I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.

In the English Bible we have also 'the beginning and the ending,' but this clause is not found in the best manuscripts; yet it properly represents the true sense, for alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, between which, of course, all the others are included; consequently they represent the whole. There was a similar use of the first and last of the Hebrew letters, which may have originated in the conception of writing as containing all knowledge and wisdom, especially the whole truth of divine revelation. Hence we may understand the expression, here applied to God, as signifying that He is the source from which all things originate, and the end in which they terminate, in the sense of the words: "He is before all things, and in Him all things consist (Col. i. 17). In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). The meaning of 'who is and was and is to come' has been given (14).* Among the incommuni-

* Such references are to preceding pages of the book.

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cable attributes of God, that one which is expressed by 'the Almighty' is here selected for emphasis. The Greek word which is so rendered signifies by its etymology 'the All-Ruler,' and in the Septuagint it is used as equivalent both to 'the Lord of hosts' and to 'the Almighty.' There can be no doubt but that it is intended to include both these ideas here, i. e. omnipotence and universal dominion. He who speaks these words, which seem to be appended as a sort of seal to the preceding announcement concerning the Lord's coming, to give the strongest assurance that the prophecy shall be fulfilled, is simply 'the Lord God, the Almighty,' without reference to any distinction of persons: but as they are subsequently applied to Himself by the Lord Christ (Rev. xxii. 13) He may properly be understood as here claiming this universal dominion, and as asserting His power to establish and maintain it, in accordance with a declaration of His elsewhere: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Mat. xxviii. 18).

In conclusion, the Coming of the Lord, as here announced, was regarded by the apostles and early Christians as the great hope of the church. For they are represented as 'looking for the blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ' (Tit. ii. 13); and elsewhere, as we have seen (20), their state of mind is described by many similar expressions. This hope seems to have too little place in the Christian experience of our time. We must try to recover it, for which we shall find abundant reasons in these visions, closing with the words: "I come quickly. Amen, come, Lord Jesus."

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III

PATMOS ECSTATIC VISION THE SEVEN CHURCHES 1 9–11

Immediately after the announcement of his subject, we have the account which the author gives of himself, of the place where, and of the state of mind in which, he received these visions; also, of a command given him to write them down, and send them to seven particular churches. In this brief record we shall find several very interesting and significant statements.

9 I John, your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

In these words he addresses himself to the readers and hearers of his book, upon whom his blessing has just been pronounced, as their brother and fellow-partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and patience which came to them from their being 'in Jesus,' as the branches are in the vine (John xv. 1–6), in order to awaken their sympathy and interest, and to confirm them in the patient endurance of the trials through which they were passing to the glories of the coming kingdom.

The island to which he had been banished, as he here seems to intimate, for his fidelity in witness-bearing to the word of God and to his divine Master, still bears the name of Patmo, being situated near the coast of Greece in what was anciently called the Icarian sea. Probably it had been selected as the place of his banishment because it was small, rough, and desolate, though now it contains 4 or 5000 inhabitants. It has a Greek church, and an old monastery, supposed to have been built by one of the Christian emperors of Constantinople, called the Monastery of St. John the Divine, whose library is said to contain many ancient and valuable

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manuscripts. About half way up the highest mountain on the island there is a cave which an ancient tradition not improbably designates as the abode of the Seer whilst he received these revelations. At this time, about the year 95 or 96 of the Christian era, 25 or 26 years after the destruction of Jerusalem, he must have been 80 or 90 years old. Domitian, who was then upon the throne of the Roman empire, was a very corrupt and abandoned character, distinguished, even among the emperors of those times, for his wanton cruelty. In his reign a fierce and bloody persecution raged against the Christians, which, however, had commenced before under the insane Nero, when St. Peter and St. Paul obtained their martyr-crowns. It was near the close of Domitian's reign that St. John was banished to Patmos, where he seems to have remained only a short time, probably not more than a year, for he was set at liberty when that tyrant was assassinated in the year 96. The account of his banishment which has come down to us is as follows: "The apostle John was apprehended by the Proconsul of Asia, and sent to Rome, where he was miraculously preserved from death when thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil. The idolaters, who pretended to account for such miracles by sorcery, blinded themselves to this evidence, and the tyrant Domitian banished John to the island of Patmos, one of the Sporades, where he was favored with those heavenly visions which he has recorded in the Apocalypse." This is related by Tertullian, a very eloquent, learned, and pious man, who lived in the second century, near enough to the time to be perfectly acquainted with all the circumstances; nor do we know anything inconsistent with its literal truth; also, it may be regarded as the more probable, because there must have been some reason why St. John was banished, instead of being put to death, as were his fellow-apostles, and this reason may have been his miraculous preservation as here related. For we may be sure that no human power, nor any property of matter, nor any force of nature, could avail to destroy his life until he had received, and had communicated to the church, these wonderful revelations.

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10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day: and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, 11 saying, What thou seest write in a book, and send it to the seven churches: unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamus, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

'The Lord's Day' occurs nowhere else in Scripture, but we have the best of reasons for understanding the expression as designating the first day of the week, upon which our Lord rose from the dead, in consequence of which it became the Christian Sabbath.* It may properly be called Sunday, as the day of celestial radiance.

But what does our Seer mean by his being 'in the Spirit' on that day; in which state he seems to have been while all these visions were made to pass before his interior faculties? In answer to this question, we may observe that the word ἔκστασις, ecstasy, which in the New Testament is commonly used to express this mental state, signifies a standing out of one's self, or as we say, being in a transport. It is of frequent occurrence, being mostly rendered by the word 'trance.' Thus it is said that St. Peter 'fell into a trance' (Acts x. 10), or, more precisely, 'an ecstasy fell upon him,' when he saw the vision concerning the centurion Cornelius. Speaking of it himself he says, 'In an ecstasy I saw a vision' (xi. 5). St. Paul also expresses himself in a similar manner, saying, 'Whilst I prayed in the temple, I was in an ecstasy' (xxii. 17); and he describes another such rapture in the words: "I knew a man in Christ . . whether in the body . . or out of the body, I cannot tell, God knoweth, such a one caught up into the third heaven . . into Paradise; and he heard unspeakable things, which it is not lawful for man to utter" (2 Cor. ii. 24). We have many examples of this spiritual rapture in the Old Testament prophets, who describe it as 'the Spirit of God coming upon them,' as their 'being in the Spirit of God,' and 'in the visions of God.' It seems to have been common also in apostolic times, and not unknown in

* For the evidence that it is truly the Sabbath, see *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, xiii.

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the subsequent history of the church, according to the prophecy cited by St. Peter to account for the wonderful phenomena on the day of Pentecost: "This is that which was spoken of by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and upon my servants and upon my handmaidens in those days will I pour out of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy" (Acts ii. 17–18). Even in our own times it has been known to occur (and why not?) especially in the death-bed experiences of God's dear saints. I have known several instances of it, resting upon the faithful testimony of those who were just about to depart out of this life. Nor should such things be deemed incredible. For as the powers and functions of the natural life grow weak; as the ties which bind the soul to earth are sundered; why should it be thought incredible that the veil of sense, which hangs before the spiritual world, should be withdrawn; that things at other times invisible should become visible to our interior faculties; that heaven should be opened, as it were, and the rapt spirit should long to soar away to the arms of her Saviour and to her celestial glories? For this is the experience which is so finely described in the well known hymn, entitled *The Dying Christian*, although the author could hardly have had any other than a poetical knowledge of it:

Hark, they whisper, angels say,
Sister spirit, come away.
What is this absorbs me quite,
Steals my senses, shuts my sight,
Drowns my spirit, stops my breath?
Tell me, my soul, can this be death?
The world recedes, it disappears,
Heaven opens on my eyes, my ears
With sounds seraphic ring.
Lend, lend your wings, I mount, I fly;
O Grave, where is thy victory?
O Death, where is thy sting?

Thus we may comprehend, in some sort, what our Seer means by his being 'in the Spirit,' when he saw these visions,

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as if he had said: The Spirit of God was upon me; I was in a transport; my bodily senses were closed up; with my natural eyes I saw nothing; with my natural ears I heard nothing; but my interior faculties were opened and quickened; with the eyes and the ears of my spirit I saw and heard wonderful things, even these transactions in the spiritual world of which I here bear record. And thus we may comprehend the mental state of the prophets and apostles, when they received their communications from God, which can hardly fail to be a great aid to our faith. For when we understand something of the manner in which the spiritual world was laid open to them; that it was by their natural faculties being put in abeyance for the time, and their spiritual faculties quickened by the Spirit of God working in them; it seems no longer surprising that they were enabled to give us such wonderful disclosures of the invisible world and of future events; nor that they should deliver them with such unwavering assurance. For their word in all their deliverances is, 'Thus saith the Lord.' Their tongues never falter, their trumpets give no uncertain sound, even in their predictions of events thousands of years in the future, and contrary to all human probability: predictions such as no men in their senses, without the consciousness of supernatural enlightenment, would ever have dared to hazard, and which, if they had not been inspired of God, would never have been fulfilled.

The Seer does not inform us whose voice this was, which he heard 'as a trumpet,' yet evidently it spoke with divine authority. But the fact, that it was heard behind him, taken in connection with a passage in one of the prophets, 'Thine ear shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it' (Is. xxx. 21), can hardly be without significance, especially as it is subsequently emphasized by his twice telling us that it caused him to turn round. Probably it was intended to represent the unexpected manner in which the Lord often manifests Himself, and that His revelations are such that they cannot be anticipated, on account of the inscrutableness of His wisdom, because 'His ways are not

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our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts' (Is. lv. 8). Hence He has given us many examples of such epiphanies, as when He appeared to Abram at the sacrifice of Isaac, to Hagar in the wilderness, to Moses in the burning bush, to the parents of Samson, to the child Samuel, to Mary Magdalene on the morning of His resurrection, and to Saul of Tarsus on his journey to Damascus. By their frequency we are divinely admonished to hold ourselves always in readiness to receive His communications in unanticipated and surprising forms, and never to predetermine in our minds with what instructions He shall reveal His will or Himself to us. For such predeterminations are always irrational and often fatal. It was precisely in this way that the Jews were led to reject and crucify Him. For they had predetermined that He should come as a conquering king, with outward pomp and circumstance, and should exalt them to temporal dominion over their enemies; and when He came as a meek and lowly Saviour, whose kingdom was not of this world, it was a foregone conclusion that they would not recognize Him. Hence it is to be feared that they who, in like manner, have settled it in their minds that His future coming shall be 'with observation,' with outward manifestations of His glory, to bestow upon His saints the temporal dominion of the earth, will, if it prove otherwise, be unable to recognize Him. It is never safe to hold opinions as to the forms and particulars of the distant future otherwise than provisionally, liable to be modified and completely overturned by the events when they shall come to pass. And we may be quite sure that the voice of divine instruction and guidance, whether by enlightening our minds to a better understanding of God's revealed will, or by the leadings of His providence, will often come to us from behind, and cause us to change our preconceived opinions, and to turn our faces in a direction the opposite of that in which we have been looking. Accordingly, we shall find that the general course of providence in the history of the church and the world, as outlined in these visions, is entirely different from any that could have been anticipated.

The seven churches to which the Apocalypse was to be

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sent were all included in the Roman province of Proconsular Asia. But there were many other churches in that province at the time, so that we still want a reason why only these are named, and this reason we must find in the symbolical meaning of the number seven (14). For thus we see that these churches represent, and consequently the work is addressed to, the universal church, not only of that, but of all subsequent ages. This will become still further evident from the following considerations: (1) The words with which all the Epistles addressed to these churches by name, close: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. iii. 22); which form of expression is one of universal significance and application: (2) The blessing is pronounced upon all who read, or hear, and keep the things written in the book: (3) The instructions, admonitions, warnings, and promises, even those contained in the particular messages to the churches named, are manifestly intended for all Christians: (4) The revelations in the whole book take so wide a range, cover such immense periods of time, and are of such a universal character, that they cannot be understood otherwise than as containing matters of the deepest concern for the church in all ages: (5) This view has come down to us from the second century, for in the Muritorian Fragment on the Canon of Scripture we have the words: "John, though in the Apocalypse he writes to the seven churches, speaks to all." It is also probable that these churches were selected for this symbolical purpose on account of their representative character in their spiritual states and external circumstances, with which St. John must have been well acquainted. For it is not likely that he remained long at Jerusalem after the blessed mother of the Lord had departed out of this life; subsequently to which he seems to have removed to Ephesus, and to have resided there until his decease; hence the first of the Epistles is naturally addressed to the Ephesian church. Thus we see that what he is here commanded to write down and send to these churches is not only the messages addressed to them by name, but all the visions of the book, and that these are intended for the whole church in all subsequent ages.

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'Thus the mouth which persecution closes God opens, and causes it to speak to the world: though now an exile in a desert island, our Seer is enabled to give his testimony before the present and all future generations of mankind. Thus also Luther, from his Wartburg prison, yet speaks by his translation of the Bible to the Germanic peoples, and John Bunyan, from his Bedford jail, by his divine allegory to the whole world.'

The immediate object of these revelations was to confirm the faith and patience of the primitive Christians under their cruel persecutions; but their ultimate object was the same for the people of God in all subsequent ages, under whatsoever trials and sorrows, struggles and conflicts with the world, the flesh, and the devil they might be called to pass. For this is the great need of all time; and I know not whether it was ever greater than it is now. For this is an age of great commotion in thought and life, when strenuous efforts are made by men of no mean ability to cast off the authority of God, and to banish Him from the world which He has created, and which He upholds by the Word of His power. The scepticism of 'science, falsely so called,' materialism, spiritualism, communism, nihilism, atheism, impurity, social and political corruption, repudiation of national obligations to God and His Christ, rage for the acquisition of wealth, dishonesty in business, adulteration of food, the liquor traffic, intemperance; but, more than all, it is to be feared, unbelief, luxury, and worldliness in the church: these are some of the signs and portents of our time, which do sorely try the faith and patience of all true believers, and for which the judgments and plagues written in this book will surely come upon the church and the world. We, therefore, have no less need than the church of the first ages had to drink into the spirit of these sublime revelations of the spiritual world, these sure predictions of future events, these divine instructions, admonitions, warnings, promises, encouragements, and blessings. Hence they are inscribed and addressed to us, no less than they were to the seven churches of Asia; and so they have always been understood, not only by learned interpreters, but also by the

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lowly and simple minded. It is to us who believe in the Lord Jesus that His beloved disciple addresses his affectionate greeting: "Grace be unto you and peace from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth." It is for us to rejoice in this glowing doxology: "Unto Him that loveth us, and hath washed us from our sins in His blood, and hath made us a kingdom [and] priests unto God and His Father, unto Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever." Yea, it is as if this holy apostle, in his remote old age, his face glowing from his open communion with his and our Lord, now stood before us, and pronounced upon us his mighty benediction: "Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things written therein, for the time is near." And it is for us to live in constant expectation of the Lord's coming, with these glorious manifestations of His grace and power, to subdue the nations unto himself, that we may keep ourselves unspotted from the world, and may be accounted worthy to enter into the Holy City.

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IV

OPENING VISION THE LORD OF GLORY IN THE MIDST OF HIS CHURCHES I 12–20

This sublime vision of the Lord arrayed in the symbols of His majesty and glory, in the midst of His churches, was beheld by the Seer whilst he was in the state of spiritual ecstasy (26). It was introduced by 'a great voice, as of a trumpet,' which he heard behind him (28); and it is given here as an introduction, not only to the Epistles that immediately follow, but also to all the subsequent revelations; for it is with these characteristic traits that the Lord will manifest Himself even to the close of the book.

12 And I turned to see the voice which spake with me; and, having turned, I saw seven golden light-bearers.

Here, by a common figure of speech, the voice stands for the person, as in the words: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (John i. 23). These light-bearers, or lamp-stands, as interpreted by the Lord himself at the close of the vision, are the symbol of the seven churches, and consequently of the church universal (30). The fundamental idea in the symbolism of gold, the purest and most precious of all the metals, is that of the utmost purity and preciousness; and accordingly it frequently denotes the most precious things, such as faith, charity, holiness. Hence these light-bearers are of gold to signify that the church is the most precious of all things to her Lord, 'who hath purchased her with his own blood' (Acts xx. 28), and who adorns her as His Bride with the beauties of His own character (Ez. xvi. 10–14). As light-bearers, they signify that she is the light of the world, that it is her vocation to shine into its darkness, and to show the way of life to lost souls, as in the Lord's words: "Ye are the light of the world. . . . Let your light

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so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Mat. v. 14–16).

13 And in the midst of the light-bearers, One like unto a son of man, clothed down to the feet, and girt about the breasts with a golden girdle.

He who is thus described can be no other, of course, but the Lord Jesus Christ, for it was as 'One like unto a son of man' (Dan. vii. 13), that He often appeared to the prophets, and in the Gospels He is called 'the Son of Man' upwards of 60 times. The expression denotes His true and proper humanity, as consisting of 'a true body and a reasonable soul' in the unity of one personality; in virtue of which He belongs to the human species, is our brother, and by which, offered in sacrifice to God, He acquired His authority, as a man, to govern and judge the world. He appears in the midst of the light-bearers to denote that He dwells in the church, in vital union with His people, who constitute His visible body on earth (7), and the organ of His manifestations of Himself unto the world, as in the words of St. Paul: "He [God] hath . . given Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph. i. 22–23); and in His own words: "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world (Mat. xxviii. 10). Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (xviii. 20). And surely we, His people, would never fail to recognize Him as present with us, and would always rejoice in the light of His countenance, if it were not for our unbelief, the feebleness of our faith in these sweet promises and gracious assurances. Orientals, when they had anything to do which required effort, were accustomed to gird up their loins, as it is said of Elijah: "He girded up his loins and ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel" (1 Ki. xviii. 46). Hence the girdle in that position became a common symbol of strenuous exertion, especially in service, as it is said of the Lord: "Righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins" (Is. ii. 5). But here He appears with a

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golden girdle, not on His loins, but about His breasts, where it was worn by the Jewish high priests and kings. In fact, the golden girdle on the breast, and the flowing robe 'down to the feet,' were the insignia both of the high priests and of the kings in Israel. Here, therefore, they symbolize the royal majesty and authority, along with the priestly office and functions, of the Lord; in the exercise of which royal priesthood He makes atonement for our sins, offers up His all-prevalent intercessions for us, subdues us unto Himself, and conquers all His and our enemies: and the girdle, as being of gold, represents the purity, excellence, and preciousness of His work and service in both these offices.

14 And His head and His hair were white as white wool, as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; 15 and His feet were like unto burnished brass, as glowing in a furnace; and His voice was as the voice of many waters.

The head, being the seat, becomes the symbol, of all man's spiritual faculties. The hair unshorn is a Scriptural symbol of extraordinary consecration to God, and of spiritual power from such consecration, as Samson, a consecrated Nazarite, must not have his hair shorn (Judges xiii. 5), and hence his preternatural strength (xvi. 19). White is the symbol of purity and victory, from which, in these visions, it never varies. The point of comparison here between the Lord's hair and wool is not that of texture, but simply color. Nor has this whiteness any reference to His personal appearance in the flesh, for a uniform tradition ascribes to Him hair of a gold or bright auburn hue; which is not a little remarkable, since black or dark hair was and still is almost universal among pure Hebrews. Still less is this white hair that of old age, for it is luminously brilliant, like the driven snow; but, like the sword going forth out of His mouth, it is to be taken as wholly symbolical, to denote His Nazaritic consecration, purity, holiness, and victorious power. Here also we should recall the words of the prophet: "I beheld . . and the Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool" (Dan.

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vii. 9); for evidently this striking characteristic could not be thus transferred without an intention to identify the Christ of the Apocalypse with the Jehovah of the Old Testament. This idea of the Lord's absolute divinity is still further developed in the statement that 'His eyes were as a flame of fire.' For the fundamental meaning of fire, as a symbol, is that of the justice of God, either as a purifying or a consuming power, as in the words: "He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mat. iii. 11). For our God [not God out of Christ, as often misquoted] is a consuming fire" (Heb. xii. 29). The eye is the symbol of knowledge and wisdom, for

> The eyes of the Lord are in every place,
> Keeping watch upon the evil and the good (Prov. xv. 3).

In this comparison of His eyes to a flame of fire, therefore, we have represented His piercing and just discernment of the secrets of all hearts, His burning zeal against all injustice and wickedness, and both the consuming and purifying influences which He thus exerts. For as fire penetrates all things, separates the dross from metals, and purifies whatever it does not consume, so the Lord's searching discernment pierces into the darkest recesses of our souls, and so does the exercise of His just judgment, by consuming our corruptions, purify our hearts and lives. Hence the final purification of the earth, which will complete what was only partially accomplished by the flood, will be, whether literally or figuratively, by fire. The word here rendered 'burnished brass' is of very doubtful meaning, but taken in connection with those that follow, 'as glowing in a furnace,' it is evidently intended to represent the feet of the Lord as of exceeding brightness, to denote that He is all glorious, even to the lowest and least honorable parts of His body, in allusion to the prophecy: "How beautiful are the feet of Him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace . . that sayeth unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!" (Is. lvii. 7). Moreover, since the feet are the instruments of motion, and the Lord is hereafter described as 'walking in the midst of

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the light-bearers' (Rev. ii. 1), this appearance may be intended to represent the glory of His movements in the church. In order to feel the full force of the sublime image in the words, 'His voice was as the voice of many waters,' one must have heard the roar of the ocean in a storm, when the great waves dash upon each other, or roll in upon a rock-bound coast, with a strength, massiveness, as it were, a solidity of sound, that drowns all others, and seems to fill all space. It is a symbol of His almighty power, and more explicitly, that when He speaks, He means to be heard and obeyed.

16 And He held in His right hand seven stars; and out of His mouth there went forth a sharp two-edged sword; and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

The image of 'the seven stars held in His right hand' He interprets at the close of the vision. That of 'the sharp two-edged sword going forth out of His mouth' represents the word of God: "The sword of the Spirit . . is the word of God (Eph. vi. 17). The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing, even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a judge of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. iv. 12). The Lord now comes forth to judge the world by His word, and almost the whole book is occupied with this judgment, which reaches its final stage in the vision of 'the great white throne' (Rev. xx. 11), in fulfilment of his own prophecy: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I have spoken shall judge him in the last day" (John xii. 48). The sharpness of the sword, both of point and edge, for piercing and cleaving, as if it should divide limb from limb, and penetrate to the marrow of the bones, represents the searching power of the word, in that it brings to light the most secret thoughts and purposes of the human heart; which is one of its most characteristic traits, whereby it is eminently distinguished from all merely human compositions. The two edges of the sword may contain an

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allusion to the twofold function of the word, whereby it either slays the enmity of the carnal mind, and thus becomes the instrument of salvation, or, where it meets with obdurate resistance, cuts men off in their sins. For the word of the gospel, where it is not 'a savor of life unto life,' must needs become 'a savor of death unto death' (2 Cor. ii. 16), as also in the words of the Lord: "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin" (John xv. 22). In the subsequent visions, we must be careful not to lose sight of the gracious function of this two-edged sword. The symbolism of the sun is quite complex. For, as the source of light and heat, it represents the primary and subordinate sources and supplies of intellectual, moral, and spiritual light and quickening; and as its heat, when excessive, or received under unfavorable conditions, is deleterious, it represents also destructive spiritual influences; of all which we have many such instances as the following: "God is a sun (Ps. lxxxiv. 11). The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings (Mal. iv. 2). The sun shall not smite thee by day (Ps. cxxiv. 6). When the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away" (Mat. xiii. 6). Here the dominant idea seems to be that of a spiritual glory in the Lord's countenance, in allusion to His transfiguration, which St. John had witnessed, when 'His face did shine as the sun' (Mat. xvii. 2), also to the following: "The light of the King's countenance is life (Prov. vi. 5). Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us (Ps. iv. 6). The light of thy countenance did save them (xliv. 3). God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6). For as the sun shining in his strength scatters the shades of night, and gives light to the natural world, so the light of the Lord's countenance banishes from our minds the darkness of ignorance, error, and sin, from our hearts the gloom of depression and sorrow, and dries up all our tears.

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17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead: and He laid His right hand upon me, saying, Fear not, I am the first and the last, 18 and the living One; and I was dead, and, behold, I am alive forever and ever; and I hold the keys of Death and of Hades.

This effect was produced upon the Seer, no doubt, by spiritual awe and fear in presence of such an overwhelming manifestation of the Lord's glory, as when the disciples beheld a similar unveiling on the mount of transfiguration, 'they fell on their faces and were sore afraid' (Mat. xvii. 6). For such awe and fear we naturally feel when the spiritual world is disclosed to our spiritual senses; and such disclosures would paralyze all our faculties, if it were not for their gracious character, and for the interior support received from the Lord. For to behold His glory is to die unto self and the world; and it was in this sense, though misunderstood by the Old Testament people, that God said to Moses: "Thou canst not see my face, for there shall no man see me and live" (Ex. xxxiii. 20). The right hand of the Lord is a frequent symbol of His power and wisdom exercised for the deliverance and safety of His people, as in the following instances:

> **Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious in power;**
> **Thy right hand, O Lord, dasheth in pieces the enemy (Ex. xvi. 6).**
> **Now know I that the Lord saveth His anointed;**
> **He will answer him from the heaven of His holiness**
> **With the saving strength of His right hand (Ps. xx. 6).**

With this symbolical meaning, the Lord now lays His right hand upon the fainting Seer, and restores him from his deathly swoon, saying, 'Fear not,' which is the word of the gospel throughout to all believers. He adds also, 'I am the first and the last, and the living One,' whereby He again identifies himself with the Jehovah of the Old Testament; and in the words that follow, 'I was dead, and, behold, I am alive forever and ever,' He declares that He is the Christ who was crucified, and is now risen from the dead to a life that shall know no end. Death and Hades are probably the most difficult symbols in the book. They are personifications through-

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out and the old Jewish interpreters understood them as representing living personal beings, which also seems best to agree with what is said of them in these visions, for we shall see hereafter that their destiny is to be 'cast into the lake of fire' (Rev. xx. 14). Yet here their keys are mentioned, which implies the idea of a prison. Death sometimes stands for pestilence, that being one of the greatest powers which destroy life; and Hades, for a place where the souls of the dead are imprisoned, also a state of torment hardly distinguishable from hell. Here they seem to be different names for the dark realm of sin and death, over which the Lord has obtained control by His most holy sacrifice; for all that they can signify is the consequence of sin, from which He delivers His people, and hence He is said to hold their keys.

19 Write, therefore, the things which thou sawest, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter: 20 the mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden light-bearers. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven light-bearers are the seven churches.

Because he has been favored with this wondrous vision of the Lord in His glory, and his suspended faculties have been thus graciously restored, 'therefore' he is to write down what he has seen and heard, and what he shall see and hear afterwards; for the order of time here does not seem to be that of historical events, but of the successive visions. And he is to give special attention to 'the mystery (that which has a mystical or symbolic import) of the seven stars, and to the seven golden light-bearers.' This renewed command to make a record of the visions implies, of course, the one previously given (26), to send it to the seven churches, i. e. not only the Epistles addressed to them by name, but also the whole Apocalypse, as intended for the church universal (30).

But who are these angels represented by the seven stars? A great many different answers have been given, but that which seems liable to fewest objections, and best to harmonize with all the statements concerning them, is, that they are the pastors of these churches, representing the pastorate of the whole church. This interpretation rests upon such con-

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siderations as the following: (1) These angels cannot be such in a literal sense for two reasons: (a) The Epistles addressed to them were writings on parchment or papyrus, and we can hardly conceive how such material manuscripts could be sent to, or received by, literal angels; (b) they are charged with all the sins and corruptions of their several churches, which is inconsistent with the character of holy angels: (2) The word angel means a messenger, and pastors are God's messengers, who bring the glad tidings, or gospel of His grace, to their churches, which is a good reason why they should be called angels: (3) The Epistles are evidently intended for the churches, yet they are addressed to their angels, as if to their rulers and teachers, to whose pastoral care they were entrusted, who should be held responsible for their purity, and who should read the messages of the Spirit unto them in their public assemblies, which would be the proper duty of their pastors: (4) This interpretation has the authority of the greatest number of sound and able expositors. Taking it, then, as the true one, we must understand that pastors are here represented by stars to signify that it is their vocation to give forth the light of the knowledge of God and divine things; in which, moreover, they are identified with their churches as light-bearers; and thus additional emphasis is given to the idea that the church, including her pastorate, is the depository of spiritual light amidst the darkness of the world. In fine, these stars are held in the Lord's right hand to signify that the pastors of His churches are protected, upheld, and controlled by His wisdom and power, and are very dear to Him, as elsewhere they are called 'the signet on His right hand' (Jer. xxii. 24).

Such was this wondrous unveiling of the Lord in His glory which St. John beheld what time he was 'in the Spirit on the Lord's Day' (26): nor was he disobedient to the heavenly vision, but proceeded, as he was commanded, to make a faithful record of what he saw and heard, and to send it to these particular churches, for the use of the whole church at that time and in all subsequent ages. Thus, also, we are admonished that whatever we receive from the Lord is not

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to be kept to ourselves, but is to be communicated to others, especially to our fellow Christians: an admonition to which I, in my poor way, strive to give heed in the publication of this work, the fruit of seven years' strenuous but delightful toil. For such is 'the communion of saints' that grace which does not make us the ministers of grace to others is no grace to us. Let us endeavor, then, to possess ourselves of the blessing which this sacred record contains (10). For the Lord in His glory is ever present with us as truly as He was with His beloved disciple in Patmos, or with His seven churches in Asia, only let us have faith to realize it. The two-edged sword of His word still goes forth from His mouth to judge the secrets of our hearts, and it is for us to submit ourselves to its searching and infallible judgments; for surely it will slay the enmity of the natural man in us, and purify our lives, or it will execute all its threatenings, and slay our souls with the second death. Let us consent to die unto self, the world, and sin, to be 'crucified with Him, to be baptized into His death' (Rom. vi. 2–4), and He will lay His right hand upon us, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever and ever; and I hold the keys of Death and of Hades.' In the deepest humiliation let us worship Him who here reveals Himself in His glory, whom we shall one day behold on His 'great white throne,' and whose voice we shall then hear, as the voice of many waters, pronouncing the word of our final destiny: that word which will open to us the pearl-gates of the New Jerusalem (Rev. xx. 21), and give us to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God, and to drink of the river of the water of life which flows forth out of the throne of God and the Lamb (xxii. 1–2), or will consign us to the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death (xix. 15).

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V

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS THE CHURCH IN DECLENSION II 1–7

The preceding vision closes the introduction of the book, which is immediately followed by the first series of revelations, that of these Epistles to the seven churches; the primary object of which was, as has been said, to confirm the faith and patience of the people of God in those times of grievous persecution and temptation to apostasy; when they 'had trial of mockings and scourgings . . bonds and imprisonment . . were stoned . . were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword. . . . They wandered about in sheepskins, in goat-skins . . in deserts and mountains and dens and caves of the earth . . being destitute, afflicted, tormented . . of whom the world was not worthy' (Heb. xi. 36–38). In fact, they suffered such extreme afflictions from the fierceness and rage of their bloody persecutors; such multitudes of them were put to death, including their most distinguished pastors and teachers and their women and children; such was the insecurity of life and property for those who survived; and so overwhelming was the general misery, that they must have been sorely tempted to think that they were God-forsaken fanatics and fools, as they were commonly regarded by their pagan contemporaries. Especially, when we remember that they could always save their lives and property by so slight a conformity to the State religion as that of sprinkling a little incense upon any altar to the Genius of the reigning Cæsar, we see that the strain upon their faith and constancy must have been simply tremendous. Hence they needed to be powerfully reassured that their cause was the cause of God, upon which the salvation of the world depended, and was

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worthy of all the sacrifices they could make for it; that they were not forsaken of God, but that He and all His heavenly hosts were enlisted on their side; that He would not fail in due time to show forth His justice upon their cruel persecutors; that in the end their vindication should be complete, and they should triumph gloriously. This was what they needed, and this was given them in these Epistles and in the subsequent visions. Thus we see why the messages all close with promises of the most glorious rewards 'to him that overcometh' (Rev. ii. 26–28). And doubtless the beloved disciple was chosen to be the organ of communication between them and their Lord for this reason among others, that he was their brother and companion in their tribulation and patience, who himself had suffered virtual martyrdom, and was then in banishment 'for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (25). For so their consolations would flow through the heart of him who stood nearest to their Lord, and who was in the tenderest sympathy with them in all their need of sustaining grace.

But the instructions, admonitions, promises, and consolations in these Epistles are of universal application (30). For the spiritual states of these churches, which are portrayed with a few master strokes, such as in any merely human composition would be regarded as the perfection of art, constantly reproduce themselves in other churches, and they cover the ground of the most prevailing religious experiences in all ages. The representative character of these seven churches must be constantly borne in mind (31). For even now it would be easy to find Christian communities, as they are here represented, (1) in declension from former love, (2) in neglect of necessary discipline, (3) infested with immoral doctrines and practices, (4) infected with idolatry, (5) in a state of lukewarmness, (6) spiritually dead whilst having a name to live, (7) in spiritual prosperity, and triumphing over their enemies. Several of these traits may be combined in one and the same church, whilst those of spiritual prosperity and victory may have been more conspicuous in primitive times, and may become so hereafter, than they are now. Hence the

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great importance of these messages of the Spirit to us all, as expressed in the solemn admonition with which they all close: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Rev. ii. 7).

1 Unto the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These things saith He that holdeth fast the seven stars in His right hand, that walketh in the midst of the seven golden light-bearers.

Ephesus, at this time, was a great and flourishing city, the capital of Proconsular Asia, and next after Corinth the most important seat of the ancient Mediterranean commerce. It was situated near the mouth of the river Caÿstrus or Caÿster, and its harbor, Panormus, was very celebrated. It contained that famous temple of 'the great goddess Diana' (Acts xix. 27), which was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world; 'to the beauty of which the genius of Praxiteles had contributed, and the fragments of whose richly sculptured columns, now in the British Museum, convey some idea of its vast size and splendid decorations.' Its inhabitants were Ionian Greeks, who, in general, were notorious for their luxury and licentiousness. Some wretched villages now occupy its former site. At the time of these Epistles, it contained a great Christian community, or church, which had been founded about 40 years before by St. Paul during his 3 years ministry there (Acts xx. 3), in which also Apollos, Aquila, Priscilla, and Tychicus had labored, and of which Timothy seems to have been the first bishop or settled pastor, who may have been the angel to whom this Epistle is addressed.

The two characteristics of Him who speaks and sends this message are taken from the opening vision, thus identifying Him with the Lord in His glory. But in both the forms of expression are somewhat varied: for, instead of merely holding (40), He 'holds fast' the seven stars in His right hand, to denote the absoluteness of His control over the pastors of His churches, and that He purposes not to let them go, nor to cast them off from His protection and guidance, notwithstanding they merit such pungent rebukes: also, instead of

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being in the midst of the light-bearers simply (34), here He 'walks to and fro' in the midst of them, for that is the precise meaning of the word, to signify that He acquaints himself intimately with the spiritual state of His churches, and with all their doings, and that He watches over them with the utmost vigilance and care. These particulars of His relation to churches and pastors have special appropriateness at the head of this Epistle with which the series commences.

2 I know thy works and thy labor and thy patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men; and thou hast tried them that say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars; 3 and thou hast patience, and hast borne for my name, and hast not been weary.

The Epistle begins and ends with significant and affectionate commendations, which, since the angels throughout represent their churches (41), must be understood to apply to the body of believers in this church. They had been laborious and patient, and they had not tolerated evil men in their communion; in other words, they had been faithful in the administration of necessary discipline. They had even tried some who claimed to be apostles, and had found them deceivers. Who these pretended apostles were we do not know. Some sceptical authors have imagined that St. Paul's claims to be an apostle are here alluded to, but this has not a shadow of probability, when we remember that this church had been founded by him, and the affectionate interview between him and its elders, when he last visited and admonished them in the following words: "Take heed to yourselves and to the flock in which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. For I know that after my departure grievous wolves will enter in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts xx. 28–29). This prophecy had been fulfilled; the wolves and speakers of perverse things had appeared among them; and the church had profited by these warnings

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from her great founder, and had been faithful in the application of discipline to her unworthy members. Hence her high meed of praise from the Lord in His glory for at least five eminent Christian graces: (1) Laboriousness in her active service, (2) patient endurance in her labors and in bearing her trials, (3) fidelity in purifying herself from unworthy members, (4) putting to tests which they could not bear some who falsely claimed to be apostles, (5) doing all this persistently, without becoming weary, for the name or glory of her Lord. Thus far, therefore, He says to her: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mat. xxv. 21). But in what follows He gives her one of His most searching and humiliating rebukes.

4 But I have against thee, that thou hast left thy first love.

In the English Bible the words are, 'I have [somewhat] against thee,' but here, as in so many other cases, the insertion by the translators mars and even falsifies the Lord's meaning. For, ah, it was more than somewhat that He had against this beloved church; it was that she had let go or departed from her first love; that love with which the hearts of her members had been inflamed when they were first called out of the self-righteousness of Judaism, or the darkness and corruptions of paganism, into the light and purity and peace of the gospel; that love which had for its objects their crucified Saviour, and each other, and the holy apostle under whose ministry they had been converted; which last is so vividly portrayed in his final interview with their elders, when 'he kneeled down and prayed with them all, and they wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more' (Acts xx. 36–38). Her falling away from such love was the one sin of the Ephesian church, but it was more than 'somewhat'; it might grow to be everything; and even now it overbalanced, as we shall immediately see, all her other excellencies of Christian character and service.

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5 Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee, and remove thy light-bearer out of its place, except thou repent.

Here the complete identification of the angel with his church is evident from the fact, that the sin with which he is charged is to be visited upon her. It is the church, then, that is thus solemnly admonished to remember from what former blessed estate she has fallen; how it was with her when her first love glowed in her bosom: for the effect of such memories will be to make her sensible of her sin and folly, and to humble her in the dust. For nothing can be of any avail to the recovery of her lost love, or to restore her former estate in her Lord's favor, without repentance, to which, therefore, she is thrice admonished. She must regard her declension, not as a calamity for which she has no responsibility, but as a grievous and inexcusable sin, from which she must 'turn unto God with full purpose and endeavor after new obedience.' And she must 'do the first works,' i. e. cast herself upon the mercy of God in Christ, precisely as she did when she first received forgiveness and reconciliation, and thus rekindle in her bosom the original flame of divine love. Otherwise her Lord will come to her in judgment without mercy, and remove her out of her place; she shall be blotted out of existence. In all this we have our Lord's view of the grievous sin of declension in piety, for which departure from first love is only another name.

6 But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

As if to soften the severity of the preceding rebuke, and certainly to encourage the church to repentance and reformation, the message now returns to words of commendation and praise. But who were these Nicolaitans? Some have imagined that 'Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch' (Acts vi. 5), and one of the seven deacons in the church at Jerusalem, either himself had led off an heretical sect, or that one had been formed under cover of his name; but for neither of these suppositions have we any sufficient evidence; al-

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though the existence of such a sect, and one imbued with immoral doctrines and practices, is well attested by the earliest Christian authors. It is doubtful whether these Nicolaitans were altogether distinct from, or nearly identical with, the followers of 'the teaching of Balaam' and of 'the woman Jezebel' (Rev. ii. 14, 20), in subsequent Epistles. There is no doubt, however, but that all these errorists held and practiced immoral doctrines. Whatever distinctions there may have been among them, they all agreed in this, that Christian morality was not essential to piety; than which no delusion of Satan has ever been more prevalent or more fatal. For in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there was a general divorce of morality from religion; and it was this, far more than the prevailing corruption of fundamental doctrines, which made the Reformation an outcrying necessity. Subsequently it was formulated in a doctrine, and defended in a thousand publications, by the Jesuits: nor has Protestantism accomplished anything of greater importance than the restoration of Scriptural morality to religion, so that now any claims to piety by an openly immoral person would be universally scouted. The Ephesian Church had not sunk to this depth of spiritual blindness; she still continued to abhor the immoralities of those Nicolaitans, supported therein by her Lord's eternal loathing of everything opposed to his own immaculate purity.

7 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

In the commencement of the message, it is represented as spoken by the Lord in person, and here by the Spirit, for the Lamb possesses the fulness of the Spirit (15). Here, also, we have the command of both in one, addressed to every human being, to give heed to what is thus spoken to these churches, as being equally applicable to and intended for all.

7 To him that overcometh, unto him will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.

This promise refers to the strenuous conflict and warfare which are inseparable from Christian life in this world. A

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similar one 'to him that overcometh,' or conquereth, is given at the close of the other Epistles. Here the promise is that he shall 'eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God'; and this Paradise is another name for the New Jerusalem, concerning which it is said: "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river [of life], was there the tree of life, bearing twelve [growths of] fruits, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2). This is not the place to consider the full significance of this tree, but evidently it must include all that is necessary for the nourishment of a perfect spiritual life. It should be observed, also, that this reference at the opening of the Apocalypse to its close evinces that it is nothing of a fragmentary character, but a connected whole, the end of which is clearly foreseen from the beginning.

There are several points of special interest in this Epistle, to which we should give some further attention.

1. We have here additional light upon the nature of the Lord's Coming, which is the theme of the book. For this church is warned that, unless she shall repent, He will come to her, and cause her to cease from being a church. Thus we see that His predicted advent is not that only which shall take place at the millennium (20). For it seems that this church did not repent, nor recover her first love; in consequence of which He did come to her, and executed His threatenings: and this took place long ago; long ago she ceased from being a church, and even the great city where her seat was is now a desolation.

2. The things for which the Ephesian church is thus commended are, indeed, excellent and precious things, but they could not save her from destruction. It is a blessed thing and worthy of all praise for any church to labor and bear with patient endurance in the cause of her Lord; to be zealous in purging herself from unworthy members, and in dealing with false teachers; to hate the works of those who divorce morality from religion, putting asunder what God has eternally joined together; and to do all this persistently,

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without weariness, for the glory of her Lord. Yet, as we are here instructed, for otherwise we could not believe it, all these excellent graces may coexist with such a declension in love, such a want of true charity, that, unless it be repented of, it must inevitably result in the ruin of the church. For charity is the heart of all the graces, without the vivifying action of which they cannot live: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels . . and though I have prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so as to remove mountains; but have not charity . . I am become as sounding brass, or a clanging symbol . . I am nothing" (1 Cor. xiii. 1–2). Moreover, it is instructive to have evidence, as in this Epistle, that true charity, being full and strong, may decline and be lost; for this church had possessed it in high perfection, and had lost it, so that, failing to recover it, she doomed herself to destruction. [Even the ministry of two great apostles could not save her.] And what is more common in churches and individuals than such declensions! How much of our church life is here represented!

3. How is it, then, with us? Have we all or any of these excellent graces? And if we have them all, the far more searching question remains, Have we this fervor and flame of divine love, without which they are all comparatively worthless in the sight of Him who so loved us that He gave Himself to die for us on the cross? Are we, as churches and as individuals, filled, animated, inspired with pure, fervent, self-sacrificing love to our Lord and our Christian brethren? Do we love Him more than business, wealth, honor, pleasure, comfort? Do we make sacrifice of these, or of any earthly good, for His glory, and the great cause for which He lived and taught and suffered and died? Do we love our brethren in the spirit of the precepts: "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ (Gal. vi. 2). Having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, [doing] nothing through strife or vainglory, but, in lowliness of mind, each esteeming others better than themselves"? (Phil. ii. 2). Do we visit, succor, comfort, and do them good, as

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we have opportunity? Is their prosperity our prosperity, their joy our joy, their poverty our poverty, their sorrow our sorrow? And our love for unsaved souls, is it such that we pray without ceasing, spare no efforts, make all or any sacrifices, for their salvation? Do they lie as a burden upon our hearts? For surely nothing less than this can be that charity without which we are nothing; which the church in Ephesus once possessed, but for the loss of which she was thus admonished to repentance, and for her failure to recover which she perished.

4. If, then, we find ourselves wanting in this grace of all graces, here is our call to repentance, that we may recover it; that this divine love may be kindled up again to a glowing flame in our hearts; that we may love our Lord with all our hearts, and our neighbors as ourselves, and that we may act and live accordingly. For thus only shall we, whether as individuals or communities, escape the doom of this highly gifted and renowned Ephesian Church.

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VI

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA THE MARTYR CHURCH II 8–11

We have here a striking portrait of the martyr church. She is in deep poverty with respect to worldly goods, but she is rich in grace, and in the love of her Lord; she is in great affliction from persecution, but in greater spiritual prosperity: a state of things perhaps not so common now, but certainly not altogether peculiar to the martyr age.

8 And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, who was dead and is alive.

Smyrna was a great city on the coast of Asia Minor, about 40 miles north of Ephesus. In very ancient times, it had been totally destroyed by an earthquake; after which it lay waste and uninhabited for 400 years, until it was rebuilt by Antigonus, one of the generals and successors of Alexander the great, so that it soon became one of the most beautiful cities in the world. Its name signifies myrrh, and ancient authors were never weary in sounding its praise, calling it 'the lovely city,' 'the ornament of Asia,' 'the crown of Ionia.' It is still a very important place, having a population estimated at 130,000, of which about one-fourth are Jews and Christians. Its foreign trade, which is mostly in their hands, is yet so extensive that its name is known throughout the world. Here, at a very early date, a Christian church had been founded, but by whose ministry we do not know. It soon became very flourishing, being renowned for piety and for the constancy of its martyrs and confessors. Such was its spiritual state when it was addressed in this Epistle; for it is not rebuked at all, but is highly commended, and only exhorted to perseverance. Hence, unlike that of Ephesus, and several

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other of these churches, it seems never to have become extinct; for there are two ancient Christian communities in the city at the present time.

We do not certainly know who was the angel or pastor of the church to whom this Epistle is addressed, but, in all probability, he was the venerable Polycarp, one of the most distinguished of the Apostolic Fathers, and one of the most glorious martyrs of all time. His name signifies a bearer of much fruit, and was given him, no doubt, in baptism, for, on account of its happy significance, it very early became a favorite baptismal name. It is related of him, that he was born a slave, and was purchased when an infant by a wealthy Christian lady named Calisto, who caused him to be carefully educated, and, at her death, left him heir to her great estate, all of which, however, he soon expended in charity. In his youth, he became a disciple of St. John; and, indeed, at the time of this Epistle, he must have been quite a young man; for he continued in his pastorate at Smyrna 50 years afterwards, and obtained the martyr's crown about the year 146 at a remote old age. During his long pastorate in this important church, he exerted a great and benign influence in Asia Minor, and, indeed, throughout the Christian world. A long and eloquent Epistle, which he wrote to the church in Philippi, is still extant, in which he quotes largely from our four Gospels and from most of the writings of the apostles, enforcing their teachings, especially those bearing upon the unity of the church, with apostolic tenderness and power. In fact, it reads very like Canonical Scripture.

We have a full account of his martyrdom in a circular letter which the church in Smyrna addressed to her sister churches throughout the Roman empire; from which we learn that a raging persecution had fallen upon that church, to which the heathen authorities had been stirred up by the restless malignity of the Jews. It reached at last their venerated pastor, who was arrested and brought to trial before the Proconsul of the province; who seems to have been a humane person, for he tried all means in his power to save

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Polycarp's life. He exhorted him personally, with many earnest words, not to persist in Christian confession, saying, "Reverence thy great age; swear by Cesar's fortune; what harm is there in saying, Lord Cesar, or in sacrificing, when it is to save thy life? Swear, then, reproach Christ, and I will set thee at liberty." To this, and much more of like import, Polycarp answered: "Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and He has never done me any harm: how, then, can I blaspheme my King and my Saviour?" Failing in his exhortations, the Proconsul tried him with threats, saying, "I have wild beasts ready, I will cast thee unto them, unless thou change thy mind." But the saint replied, "Call for them, then, for we Christians are fixed never to change from good to bad." Still the pagan magistrate seems to have felt that he could not give him up, for he added, "Since thou despisest the wild beasts, I will cause thee to be devoured by fire, unless thou change thy mind." But our Christian hero answered him, "Thou threatenest me with the fire that burns for an hour, but thou knowest not the fire of the future judgment, nor of that everlasting punishment which is reserved for the ungodly. But why dost thou tarry? Bring forth whatever thou wilt." The Proconsul, finding all his efforts to save him in vain, and being obliged to execute the laws of the empire against Christians, caused it to be proclaimed throughout the city, that Polycarp had confessed himself a Christian: whereupon both the heathen and Jewish inhabitants united in one tumultuous cry, that he should be put to death. Accordingly he was led to the stake. But when they were going to bind him to it, he said, "Let me alone as I am, for He who has given me strength thus far will enable me to stand in the fire without being bound." Then whilst he prayed aloud, the flames were kindled up around him. Such was the way in which this great and heroic soul obtained the martyr's crown, in fulfilment of the words of his Lord: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. ii. 10).

In the words, 'These things saith the first and the last, who was dead and alive,' the Lord refers to the more full

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characterization of Himself in the opening vision, in order to recall the whole of it, as follows: "I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and, behold, I am alive; and I hold the keys of Death and of Hades." Thus He encourages His persecuted people in Smyrna by his own example, in that He Himself had suffered martyrdom, yet had been raised up again unto such power and glory that He was now the Lord of Death and of all his dark realm. For even though they should be called to suffer death in His cause, it could do them no more harm than it had done to him, but should be the means of exalting them to the like power and glory.

9 I know thy works and thy tribulation and thy poverty (but thou art rich) and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews, and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

There is some uncertainty whether 'thy works' here are genuine; but if so, they must be taken in a good sense, as there is no rebuke, only praise. All such works are favorably known unto the Lord, who holds them in everlasting remembrance, that He may bestow upon the doers of them all gracious rewards: "For their works do follow them (Rev. xiv. 13). God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and the love which ye have shown toward His name" (Heb. vi. 10). The 'tribulation and poverty' of His people in Smyrna, including all their temporal sorrows, especially the spoiling of their goods by their ruthless persecutors, were equally well and favorably known to their compassionate Lord, and awaited like rewards at His hands. Meanwhile, in gracious compensation, they were enriched with the imperishable wealth of His love and blessing, and with all precious graces of Christian character. They did not have to wait for their treasure laid up in heaven by their good works. For poverty in this world's goods is often a blessed means of spiritual enriching, because it cherishes the sentiments of helplessness in ourselves and of dependence upon our Heavenly Father's care, and opens our hearts to receive the supplies which He has so abundantly provided for all our spiritual wants.

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Hence that matchless tenderness for the poor which overflows from His full heart in all the Scriptures, as in the words of Jesus: "Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke vi. 20). On the other hand, worldly wealth is no less frequently a cause of the deepest spiritual poverty, because it tends to self-sufficiency, pride, vanity, and provides the means for excessive indulgence in earthly and sensual gratifications. Hence the declaration, which is one of great practical significance, though it be expressed in a strong oriental hyperbole: "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mat. xix. 24). 'The blasphemy' here refers to the atrocious calumnies of the Jews against the Christians, by which they constantly incited the pagans to persecution, as we have just seen in the martyrdom of Polycarp. For Smyrna, which has now a Jewish population estimated at 9,000 souls, had then, no doubt, a much larger one; and they, persisting in their blind unbelief, and raging with calumnious blasphemies against the church, could no longer be properly called Jews, the Israel of God, but were in truth a synagogue of Satan.

10 Fear not the things which thou must suffer: behold the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tempted; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life.

We have here a prophecy which was fulfilled, in part at least, by the martyrdom of their beloved pastor. But they must not be afraid of anything they might be called to suffer; for the fear of temporal calamities is an unchristian feeling, one that often paralyzes the faculties of the soul, and results in suicide. Hence we are often cautioned against it, as in those ever memorable words of the Lord: "I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: fear Him who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear Him" (Luke xii. 4–5). For the fear of God casts out all other fears; and is itself in a legal or servile sense,

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cast out by love; which more than fills its place, because it is a nobler and stronger motive to self-sacrifice and devotion: "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath punishment: he that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John iv. 18). But nothing short of perfect love has any rightful authority to cast out the motive of fear.

Here, also, we have one of those unveilings of the spiritual world which, though not peculiar to this book, are yet its most distinctive character. For the agency of Satan in these persecutions, which was veiled under the enmity of Jews and pagans, is here disclosed. It was their great spiritual adversary who would bring upon the Smyrnæan Christians all these afflictions, that they might be tempted to apostatize. But they were not to be afraid even of him, for he was already a conquered enemy; and all his malice should be overruled in furtherance of the gracious object which their Lord had in view, namely, that their faith and patience might be tried, purified, confirmed, and perfected. For this is the object of all the temptations to which His people are subjected, as copiously exhibited in His word: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fire which cometh upon you for your temptation, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, in order that, in the unveiling of His glory, ye may rejoice with exceeding joy (1 Pet. iv. 12–13). Having been put to grief by manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, much more precious than gold which perisheth, and it is tried by fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the unveiling of Jesus Christ (i. 6–7). Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations, knowing that the trial of your faith worketh patience; and let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire wanting nothing" (James i. 2–4). Such is the gracious object of all the sufferings through which the Lord's people are ever called to pass, even though Satan may be ever so much concerned in them, and wicked men, the instruments of his malice: a great

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lesson truly, and one well worthy of being learned by heart.

As to the symbolical meaning of the number 'ten,' it is not very clear, but that of definite limitation seems best to agree with all the instances in which it is used. Followed by 'days,' as here, it probably signifies a comparatively short time. Hence the statement that 'the church should have tribulation ten days' seems intended to assure her that her trials should not be indefinitely prolonged; that their termination was already foreseen; and, indeed, her persecutions did come to an end when Constantine, the first Christian emperor, came to the throne. But even if their sufferings individually should continue as long as they lived, and should end in martyrdom, yet their patient endurance should be accepted as fidelity to their Lord, for which they should receive 'the crown of life' at His hands. This crown is the same referred to by St. Paul in that burst of triumph just before his martyrdom: "I am now poured out in sacrifice, and the time of my departure is come: I have fought the good fight; I have finished the course; I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give unto me at that day; and not unto me only, but also to all them that love His appearing" (2 Tim. iv. 6–8). St. Peter also speaks of it as follows: "When the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive the fadeless crown of glory" (1 Pet. vi. 4). Symbolically it represents, (1) as being a crown, royal authority and power, for the Lord's saved people are 'kings,' and share His throne (Rev. iii. 21); (2) as a crown of righteousness, that their righteousness is now perfect; (3) as a crown of glory, that they are partakers of all glory; (4) as a crown of life that never fades, it signifies immortality; (5) and as bestowed upon them by the Lord, the reward of their victory in their earthly conflicts. In fine, there seems to be a pointed allusion to this promise, 'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life,' in the following words of the church's circular letter concerning the martyrdom of her pastor: "By his patience he overcame

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the unrighteous ruler and received the crown of immortality."

11 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (49). He that overcometh shall not be hurt by the second death.

'The second death,' as subsequently interpreted, is 'the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone' (Rev. xx. 14). This promise to him that overcometh signifies, therefore, that hell itself shall have no power over him, and implies that he shall possess all the blessings of the saved. Given in this form, it is eminently appropriate to the martyr church, as a motive for her to be 'faithful unto death.'

Such are the words of praise and encouragement which the Lord here addresses to His beloved church in Smyrna, without one expression of disapprobation or reproof. O glorious and happy church in having such a pastor as Polycarp for so many years, and in the enjoyment of such blessed spiritual wealth and prosperity! O happy pastor, in being permitted to minister to such a people! Well might they bear with patience their poverty, persecutions, and martyrdoms, to whom their Lord could speak such comforting words! No wonder this church never became extinct, and that Smyrna, in such marked contrast with other cities where the churches were unfaithful, has been preserved as a populous and prosperous place to the present time!

There are two ideas, among many others, in this Epistle which require to be specially emphasized for the instruction and consolation of God's dear children.

1. We see here that it is possible and practicable for us to live in this world so that our blessed Lord shall have no need to censure or rebuke us; so that He will have nothing to say to us but words of commendation and praise. This, I am sure, is not commonly understood as here represented; and it is of such importance that we shall find it again in another of these Epistles. Let us be instructed, then, by the example of the Christians in Smyrna, and be animated by a holy desire and expectation of so living as to enjoy the Master's

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constant approval; so that now, as well as in the last day, He may say to us: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Mat. xxv. 21).

2. Here, also, we see the power of merited praise to quicken and ripen Christian graces. For we cannot think that the Lord so commended His people in Smyrna without design to strengthen and perfect them in those graces for which they were so eminently distinguished. This also I am afraid we do not always understand as we ought, or pastors would more frequently and heartily commend their people for their liberality, faith, love, zeal, and self-sacrifice, even when these graces may be only as grains of mustard seed, in order that they may become trees, and the birds of the air may come and lodge in their branches. We need not be afraid of doing harm; we have our Lord's example to warrant us; He teaches us what to do. And, as private Christians, we ought not to be backward to recognize in each other, with expressions of sympathy and encouragement, these graces, as they manifest themselves, even though they may still be feeble and imperfect, in order to strengthen and perfect them.

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VII

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUS THE CHURCH INFESTED WITH IMMORAL DOCTRINES AND IN NEGLECT OF DISCIPLINE II 12–17

This Epistle represents the church as infested with immoral doctrines and practices, from which she neglects to purify herself by the holy ordinance of discipline, yet as still holding fast, in the main, to the faith of her Lord.

12 And unto the angel of the church in Pergamus write: These things saith He that hath the sharp two-edged sword.

Pergamus, or Pergamum, was another great city of Proconsular Asia, about 30 miles north of Smyrna, on the river Caicus, in an extensive plain, which for beauty and fertility was said to be equal to any in the world. In former times, it had been very celebrated as the capital of the kingdom of Attalus, another of the successors of the conqueror Alexander; also, for a magnificent library of 200,000 volumes, or rolls of manuscript, which was presented by Mark Antony the triumvir, and one of the great plunderers of the world, to his mistress, Queen Cleopatra, who removed it to Alexandria in Egypt. It was in this literary city that the dressing of skins for writing material was either invented or perfected, whence we have the word parchment from Pergamum. It was rich in splendid public buildings and in works of art generally, so that it has been described as 'a city of temples, a pagan cathedral city.' Late excavations upon its site have discovered remains of some of the most magnificent temples the world has ever seen; also, a stupendous open-air altar, more than 123 feet long, 113 wide, and 40 high, covered with elaborate sculptures of the wars of gods and giants, and of other mythological subjects, all in the best style of Greek

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art. The city, now called Bergamo, has a population of about 14,000 souls; and among the ruins of its ancient splendor are found the remains of several church buildings. Here, then, in this centre of pagan culture, long before the close of the first century, a Christian church had been established, but by whom, or who was its pastor at this time, we do not know. Conjectures upon these points have been hazarded, but they do not seem to be of much value.

In this Epistle, the Lord speaks as 'having the sharp two-edged sword,' which has appeared before in the opening vision, and represents, as we have seen (37), the word of God. Appropriately it is the weapon with which He is about to smite this church for her sin of tolerating in her communion those who hold and practice immoral doctrines. But, first, she is highly commended for her fidelity and constancy in other respects, in the midst of abounding corruptions, and under persecution from which one, at least, of her members has suffered martyrdom.

13 I know where thou dwellest, where the throne of Satan is: and thou holdest fast my name; and thou didst not deny my faith, even in the days when Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

Here we learn that Pergamus had the bad eminence of being in some peculiar sense the throne of Satan. For, as we have just seen, it was a centre of pagan literature, art, and culture, which were always and everywhere bitter enemies to the cross and the truth of Christ. It was also the seat of the supreme court of the province, and hence a nucleus of judicial persecution. Moreover, it was distinguished for its numerous forms of idolatry, being a chosen seat of the worship of Zeus, Dionysius or Bacchus, Athene or Minerva, to whom the altar above described was dedicated, and Aesculapius; the last of whom, as the god of medicine and the healing art, was worshipped under the symbol of a living serpent, which was fed and tended by the priests in a sumptuous temple. Now, when we remember that throughout the Scriptures and especially in these visions, the dragon

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or serpent is the chosen symbol of Satan, it seems altogether probable that this serpent-worship was one reason, at least, why Pergamus is here called his throne. But notwithstanding such idolatries and oppositions of pagan learning and culture, this church had maintained a high degree of fidelity to her Lord. For she had not denied His faith, but had held fast His name, which here, as elsewhere, stands for His person, with special reference to public confession. In the main, she had continued faithful to Him in His divine and human personality and mediatorial offices, both in confession and life ; and this, under persecution which had resulted in the martyrdom of one of her members, Antipas by name, whom the Lord here honors for all time, as having been, in his witness-bearing, faithful unto death. We know nothing more about him, except perhaps from an ancient tradition that he was the pastor of the church, for, as such, he is commemorated to this day in the Roman martyrology. But whoever he was, it is certain that he now rejoices in his martyr's crown.

14 But I have a few things against thee: that thou hast there those who hold fast the teaching of Balaam who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication; 15 so hast thou them also who hold fast the teaching of the Nicolaitans, in like manner.

Notwithstanding the high meed of praise given to this church, there were some things in her which must be corrected ; the chief of which was, that she retained in her bosom these errorists in the fundamental matter of Christian morality, when she ought either to have purified them by subjecting them to faithful discipline, or herself by casting them out of her communion. The history of Balaam, here referred to, ought to throw all the light we need upon the errors of these followers of his teaching and example. For we read that he was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel, because he had the reputation of being a great prophet, and certainly he was inspired to deliver some grand prophecies. On this occasion, God prohibited him from

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cursing, and put into his mouth words of blessing, especially that glorious prediction :

> There shall come forth a star out of Jacob,
> And a sceptre shall rise out of Israel (Num. xxiv. 17).

Subsequently, however, in order to earn his hire, he counseled Balak to hold an idolatrous feast, and to induce the Israelites to attend it (Num. xxxi. 16). Now such feasts were commonly celebrated with rites of abominable licentiousness. It was so in this case, and the frail 'sons of Israel' fell into the 'snare'; for that is the primary meaning of the word here rendered 'stumbling block.' Thus they incurred the wrath of God, and perished to the number of 24,000 by a pestilence which fell upon them in the midst of their obscene orgies. In allusion to this history, a sect of errorists, who arose in the primitive church, were called Balaamites ; and they are characterized by St. Peter in the following terrible passage: "They walk after the flesh, and despise government. Presumptuous, self-willed, they tremble not to blaspheme dignities. . . . As unreasoning animals by nature, made to be taken and destroyed, they blaspheme things which they understand not ; and in their destruction shall be utterly destroyed, receiving the wages of iniquity ; thinking it pleasure to riot in the day time, spots and blemishes, rioting in their love feasts, while they feast with you ; having eyes full of adultery, that cannot cease from sin ; beguiling unstable souls ; having a heart exercised with covetous practices ; children of cursing ; forsaking the right way, they went astray, having followed the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of iniquity, and was rebuked for his transgression ; the dumb ass, speaking with man's voice, checked the madness of the prophet. These are springs without water, clouds driven by the tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. For uttering great swelling words of vanity, they entice by the lusts of flesh, by lasciviousness, those who are just escaping from them that live in error ; promising them liberty, while they themselves are the slaves of corruption" (2 Pet. ii. 10–19). St. Jude, also,

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describes them at equal length and in similar terms, especially as those 'who ran greedily in the error of Balaam for reward' (Jude 4–16).

Such were the distinguishing traits of these Balaamites, i.e. they were openly licentious, they were ready to commit any iniquity for hire, and they held a doctrine or teaching by which they justified themselves in these abominations, as not inconsistent with piety: in all which, as has been said, there is little doubt but that the Nicolaitans, with whatsoever minor differences, agreed with them (49).

16 Repent, therefore; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Thus the church is rebuked and admonished to repentance for her sin of retaining these immoral errorists in her communion, as well she might be; and she is threatened with a speedy visitation of her Lord in judgment, if she fail to repent and reform. Here, then, we have another proof that His coming, which is the theme of the book, is not limited to that which will take place at the millennium (50). By what influences this church, with all her excellencies of Christian character, had been led into this neglect of necessary discipline, we do not know. But probably these corrupt members had powerful connections, some of them, perhaps, interesting families, and she was afraid of plucking up the wheat with the tares. Nor is it clear what special judgment is threatened against her, but she is solemnly warned that her tenderness for her immoral members shall not save them; for the Lord will come quickly and make war upon them with the sword of His mouth (37); by which is meant, no doubt, that He will inflict upon them all the judgments and threatenings of His word against covetousness, licentiousness, and whatsoever other immoralities of which they were guilty.

17 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (49). To him that overcometh, unto him will I give of the hidden manna; and I will give him a white stone, and upon the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it.

The manna with which the Israelites were fed in the wilderness, as being nothing of earthly growth, or human pro-

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duction, but coming down out of heaven, is taken by the Lord as a type of Himself: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not the bread from heaven, but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven; for the bread of God is He who cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.... I am the bread of life.... This is the bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead; he that eateth of this bread shall live forever" (John vi. 32–58). Hence this promise to the conqueror is, that the Lord will give unto him Himself, the Word that was made flesh, in order that He may become the food of the soul unto eternal life, as represented in the sacrament of the Holy Supper. This heavenly manna is said to be 'hidden' in the sense in which Christ in the soul is called 'the hidden man of the heart' (1 Pet. iii. 4), and of the words, 'Your life is hid with Christ in God' (Col. iii. 3), i. e. as being altogether undiscernible by the faculties of the natural man. The white stone, which also shall be given, contains an allusion to the ancient custom of giving white stones to those who were acquitted and justified in judgment, and to those who conquered in the contests of the public games. Hence, and since white is the color of purity and victory (35), it is to be taken here as the symbol of the earnest or pledge of ultimate and complete victory over temptation, of personal salvation from the impurities of sin, and of acquittal and perfect justification from offences; all which proceed from the indwelling and manifestation of Christ in the soul. In fine, this new name graven on the stone to signify that it is ineffaceable, 'which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it,' symbolizes the new nature, which is constituted by the mystical union of the Lord with each member of His body, and of which the world, of course, can know nothing. The meaning of the whole symbol, therefore, is, that the conqueror in his earthly conflicts shall have Christ, as the Word of God, for the food of his spiritual nature, whereby the life of Christ shall become life eternal in him, and he shall enjoy full assurance of justification and salvation.

1. The instructions and admonitions of this Epistle seem to

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apply with special emphasis to the whole church at the present time; for her feebleness in discipline is a subject of general remark. How many scandalous immoralities are constantly occurring among her members! How frequent are the defalcations in banks and other fiduciary institutions; fraudulent abuse of trust funds, and other betrayals of trust; stealing from employers, and other thefts; breaches of the marriage vow by unscriptural divorce, and other forms of licentiousness: in which the offenders are church members, church officers, superintendents of Sabbath-schools, and persons of high esteem in Christian communities! These are only examples of a numerous class represented by these Balaamites and Nicolaitans in the church of Pergamus; for such are all church members who have 'hearts exercised with covetous practices.' How many there may be whose offences have not yet come to light is known only to God; but enough surely has been made public to convict the church at large of the grossest neglect of discipline, and to open her ears to this call of her Lord to repentance and reformation.

2. A great many influences have contributed to bring about this state of things. One is our rabid denominationalism, or sectarianism, in consequence of which, censure in one church has no recognized validity in another of a different sect; and in their competition with each other, especially in small communities, all are so anxious to secure members who may increase their pecuniary support. Another is the fear of alienating influential families; for censure of an unworthy member is almost sure to be resented by his whole family, and often by a large circle of friends and connections. Still another is the prevalent misunderstanding, which has just been alluded to, of our Lord's parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Mat. iii. 29). But more influential probably than all these, is that bondage to the world in which we now live, and which will be largely represented in subsequent visions. For this is such that we have no public opinion in the church independent of, or different from, that of the world, in dress, amusements, employments, expenditure, and hardly in mo-

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rality. Under all these and other influences, church discipline has come to be little more than a name, or the memory of something which has long been obsolete.

3. Hence this call to repentance and reformation is addressed to us, no less than it was to the church in Pergamus: and it is a most urgent call; for we see here that this neglect of discipline is a sin and an evil of such magnitude in the eyes of our Lord that He sent this Epistle chiefly for the purpose of correcting it. This was the one sin of that church; no other is charged against her. As churches, therefore, and as individuals, we are here admonished to repent of our sin, and to return to our plain duty in this matter. For it is not one that concerns the pastor and governing officials alone, but every individual member; and where the officers are derelict, it is the duty of the members to turn them out, and put others in their places who will be more faithful. We cannot neglect this matter with impunity; for if we do, the Lord will come to us quickly, and execute His just judgment upon our unworthy members:

> "But who may abide the day of His coming?
> And who shall stand when He appeareth?
> For He is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap;
> And He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver,
> And He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver;
> And they shall offer unto the Lord offerings in righteousness" (Mal. iii. 2-3).

For discipline is an ordinance of God, not only for the maintenance of purity in the church, but also for the purifying of the subjects of it, to save them from the sharp judgments of the sword in the Lord's mouth. If, therefore, she neglects to guard her own purity by this holy ordinance, He will guard it for her by punishing her unworthy members. A mournful case of this kind lately fell under my own observation, in which a church member was long tolerated in gross and well-known immoralities, from kindly regard to his amiable and interesting family, until he was left to lay violent hands on himself, and so perished in his sins. Thus it is that the Lord makes war upon the Balaamites and Nicolaitans in the bosom of His church. Such neglect of whole-

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some discipline, therefore, is cruel; for who can tell but that if this man had been subjected to it in time, he would have been saved? "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

4. There may be church members, also, who have 'hearts exercised with covetous practices,' or who are living in other immoralities, but whose offences have not yet come to light, so that they cannot be disciplined: and, for aught we can tell, they may stand high in the esteem of their communities; for Balaam had the reputation of a great prophet, and there was a Judas Iscariot in the college of the apostles. Let all such be assured in their secret souls, that nothing but repentance and reformation can save them from the fate of these Balaamites and Nicolaitans in the church of Pergamus. Failing that, the Lord is certain to come quickly, and to make war upon them with the sharp sword of His mouth, for He will execute the judgments of His word against all Judases. And He will come in an hour when they look not for Him, and will cut them off suddenly without remedy, perhaps as in the case of that church member whose sad fate has just been mentioned. They have no time to lose; the present is all that they can count upon. To-day, therefore, whilst they hear His voice calling them to repentance, and while He waits to be gracious, let them not harden their hearts, as in the day of provocation, lest He lift His hand and swear that they shall not enter into His rest (Heb. iii. 7–11).

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VIII

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA THE CHURCH INFECTED WITH IDOLATRY AND IMPURITY II 18–29

The spiritual state of this church is similar to that of the last, only much worse; for she is so generally infected with idolatry and immorality, and with a doctrine in their justification, that only a remnant of her members remain uncorrupted, and she herself is not even admonished to repentance.

18 And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath His eyes as a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished brass.

In these Epistles, St. John commences, as we have seen, with Ephesus, a great seaport, and proceeds northwards along the coast of Asia Minor to Smyrna, and next to Pergamus, where he now turns eastward and inland to Thyatira, which was situated about 20 miles from Pergamus, on the great Roman highway to Sardis, where we shall find the church of the next Epistle. For the Romans were the greatest road-builders of the ancient world, which greatly facilitated the early and rapid progress of the Christian religion. Thyatira was founded by Seleucus Nicator, still another of the generals and successors of Alexander, whose vast empire, of which the whole of this immensely populous country constituted but a single province, was partitioned at his death among his principal officers. At this time, it was included in the Proconsular province of the hardly less extensive empire of Rome. Originally it was a Macedonian colony, celebrated for various forms of industry, especially for the art of dyeing in purple; and among its ruins a Greek

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inscription has been discovered, which was set up by the trade or guild of dyers in honor of one of the Roman emperors. Hence we find that Lydia, a woman who was converted at Philippi by the ministry of St. Paul, was 'a seller of purple from Thyatira' (Acts xvi. 14). That ancient art is still practiced there, and large quantities of scarlet cloth are sent to Smyrna, whence it is exported and widely distributed. The city contains at the present time some 10,000 inhabitants, of whom about 3,000 are nominal Christians. We do not certainly know by whom this church was founded; but, in all probability, it originated from the conversion of Lydia, when she returned to her native place. When it was addressed in this Epistle, it had evidently grown to be a great and powerful community, though fearfully corrupted by idolatry and heathen impurities.

The Lord here calls Himself 'the Son of God,' an expression which does not occur elsewhere in the book, though it is probably the 'name written which no man knoweth but Himself' (Rev. xix. 12). Its meaning was largely discussed at the council of Nicæa in the fourth century, but it was not settled then in strict accordance with what is now called the orthodox doctrine on the subject, which is as follows: Christ is possessed of both a divine and a human nature. His divine nature is composed of two elements, substance and personality. The substance of this nature, in which inhere all the divine attributes, is unbegotten, underived, and numerically one with the substance of the Father, so that there is but one God. But as to His personality, or mode of subsistence, He is eternally begotten of the Father, as the eternal Son of God, the second Person of the ever blessed and adorable Trinity. As to His human nature, which he took into personal union with Himself in His incarnation, He is both the Son of God and the Son of Man, since that nature was begotten by the Holy Spirit of the blessed virgin Mary and was born of her. This profound conception of the sonship and personality of the Lord is the only one, as it seems to me, that agrees with all the Scriptural teachings on the subject; and, for those who receive it, these

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mysterious doctrines have not even an appearance of self-contradiction. His 'eyes as of flame and His feet like burnished brass' are taken from the opening vision (35); and in all these particulars He speaks of Himself in accordance with that which is to follow in the Epistle.

19 I know thy works and thy love and thy faith and thy service and thy patience, and thy last works to be more than the first.

These six distinguished graces seem to leave nothing to desire, especially the last, that the church has continued to make progress; which is in strong contrast with the loss of her first love by the Ephesian church (47). Indeed, it is most wonderful that so much of Christian grace should be found associated with the doctrinal and moral corruptions for which the Lord now proceeds to rebuke her. The best solution of this difficulty seems to be that, in these commendations, He has in view 'the remnant' who have kept themselves pure, rather than the church at large.

20 But I have against thee, that thou sufferest the woman Jezebel, who calleth herself a prophetess, and teacheth, and seduceth my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols.

Here again 'a few things' (47), in the English Bible are not genuine; and it is worthy of observation, that our oldest and best manuscript, the Sinaitic, reads here, 'I have much against thee,' which certainly expresses the true sense, and possibly is the true text. But in order to understand this rebuke, we must remember how covetousness and licentiousness have been symbolized under the character of Balaam (64); for, in a precisely similar manner, the idolatry and impurity with which this church is so deeply infected are here symbolized under the character of Jezebel. This notorious woman was a heathen princess, the daughter of a king of Tyre and Sidon (1 Ki. xvi. 31), and became the queen of Ahab, king of Israel. She was possessed of great natural abilities, which she strenuously exerted to overthrow the worship of God, and to establish in its place the idolatry of Baal and Astarte, the so-called king and queen of heaven. In thus asserting

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for herself control over religion, she claimed, as it were, to be 'a prophetess.' The measures she took to accomplish her objects were of a grossly immoral character; for she put to death all the prophets of the Lord upon whom she could lay her hands, until Elijah complained that he alone was left alive (1 Ki. xix. 19). Thus she succeeded in making her idolatry almost universal among the covenant people; only 'a remnant' of true worshippers was left. Her husband was like wax in her hands, and under her influence he became worse than any of the kings who preceded him: "Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him. . . . It was as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat" (1 Ki. xvi. 31–33).

Such was the character which is here taken to represent those in the church of Thyatira who practiced idolatry and impurity. Hence there is little probability in the supposition that this Jezebel was a real woman, and even, as some think, the wife of the pastor of the church; although her introduction in the symbol may contain an allusion to the fact, that there actually was in Thyatira an oriental superstition in which a woman did claim to be a prophetess. For it seems quite plain that Jezebel here, like Balaam in the last Epistle (65), is to be understood symbolically, to denote a form of idolatry and immorality whose followers claimed to be inspired, and so authorized to set aside or change the laws laid down in the Scriptures concerning the worship of God and the relations between the sexes. Probably their 'doctrine' was like that of some modern communists, for we know from other sources that there were such heretical sects in the primitive church. Such views were held also by certain sectaries at the Reformation; and I am personally cognizant of a case in which a number of persons of both sexes, claiming a later inspiration than that of the Bible, met together professedly for the worship of God, and performed their obscene rites *in puris naturalibus*, without even a fig-leaf. There is little doubt but that something of the same sort is represented by this woman Jezebel. For the connec-

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tion between 'eating things sacrificed to idols' with sexual impurity was such that the two could hardly be separated, because the feasts at which these things were eaten were commonly celebrated with licentious orgies, as in the worship of Baal and Astarte, of which the historic Jezebel was such an enthusiastic patroness (73). Consequently Christian people could not attend them without giving their sanction to these impurities, nor without becoming themselves corrupted, although they might not be guilty of the worst offences. It was for this reason, no doubt, that in the first general council of the church, held at Jerusalem, where the apostles were present, the eating of things sacrificed to idols was prohibited (Acts xv. 20): and hence that prohibition is not to be received as of moral or permanent, though of positive and temporary obligation, as having arisen out of the peculiar circumstances of the times.

21 And I gave her time that she should repent, and she willeth not to repent of her fornication.

Hence it appears that this was no new evil in the church; time had already been given for the guilty to repent; but they had no will or desire to repent; they persisted in their idolatries and impurities, thus 'treasuring up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God' (Rom. ii. 5).

22 Behold, I do cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they shall repent of her works: 23 and I will slay her children with death.

There is a Hebrew parallelism here, according to which the meaning is, that these idolatrous and impure members of the church should be cast into a bed of great tribulation; this bed being contrasted with the bed of adultery, as elsewhere the cup of wrath is contrasted with the cup of intoxication. The followers of this impure delusion are further characterized as Jezebel's children, who also commit adultery with her, which seems to imply that they did not withhold themselves from the worst extremes of impurity. For their punishment, 'unless they shall repent of her works,' they

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shall be slain with 'death' (Rev. vi. 7–8), which, for reasons that will appear at the opening of the fourth seal, is doubtless to be taken here in the sense of pestilence, so that this tautology is only apparent. It is well known that sinners of this character are commonly visited with grievous punishments in this world; for there is a physical disease which, at least in modern times, follows sexual impurity, one of the most terrible that flesh is heir to; and it is hard to believe, as some do, that it was anciently unknown. At all events, this prophetic threatening, as it was intended for all subsequent ages (31), is abundantly fulfilled in our time.

23 And all the churches shall know that I am He that searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto you, each one, according to your works.

The punishment of this church should be so signal that all the others should be made to know that she was visited by the judgments of the great searcher of hearts and reins, whose 'eyes were as a flame of fire,' from whom no secrets could be hid. For these licentious feasts were held mostly at night, and, no doubt, the members of Christian churches who attended them sought, from instinctive shame, to avoid publicity as much as possible. But the punishment to be inflicted upon them should be public, in the sight of all the churches; and should be such as to impress them with the conviction, that the flaming eyes of their Lord were in every place, and that the night was to Him as the day:

> Even the darkness darkeneth not to thee,
> But the night shineth as the day;
> The darkness and the light are both alike to thee (Ps. cxxxix. 12).

And all the members of the church, whether guilty of these impurities, or not, should receive according to their works. For the judgment of the Lord must be revealed and take effect in every human soul; no forgiveness of sins, nor justification by faith, nor imputed righteousness, can avail so that 'the old man' shall not be judged, condemned, and put to death. Even the saints must be 'crucified with Christ, baptized into His death, buried with Him by baptism into

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death' (Rom. vi. 1–11), in order to be partakers of His life.

24 But unto you I say, the remnant who are in Thyatira, as many as have not known this teaching, such as have not known the deep things of Satan, as they speak, I do cast upon you no other burden: 25 only that which ye have hold fast till I come.

The address is no longer to the church, but turns now to the remnant of her members who have escaped the general corruption, who have not known 'this doctrine, these deep things of Satan, as they speak.' The meaning of these strange expressions turns upon the fact, that these abominable idolatries and impurities were formulated in 'a doctrine,' a system of teaching, the followers of which claimed that none but themselves understood the deep things of God. They taught that these impurities especially belonged to the worship of the true God, as they always had to that of the false gods of the heathen; and this, on a variety of grounds, which I have not time, nor would it be of any profit, to explain. Such doctrines and practices, moreover, they blasphemously called 'the deep things of God.' But the Lord here in solemn mockery calls them 'the deep things of Satan,' which the pure members of the church have not known, and should have no desire to know. For there are depths of sexual impurity which no decent person can understand; to know which is to be defiled; which can be understood by none but the initiated. But there is a remnant in this infected church who have kept themselves pure, and upon them their Lord lays no other burden than that which they already have in resisting the influences by which they are surrounded: only let them hold fast the virtue to which they have attained till He shall come to their deliverance by executing His judgment upon Jezebel and her children, by which their faith and piety cannot fail to be greatly confirmed. For when the righteous see the ungodly suddenly cut off in their sins, and the justice of God thus signally manifested, they have powerfully impressed upon their minds the eternal truth, that men cannot live in sin with impunity, and are thereby mightily strengthened against their own tempta-

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tions. In this way, for aught that we can know, a hell for the wicked may be absolutely essential to the salvation of the righteous. Finally, this coming of the Lord is another illustration of the theme of the book.

26 And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works to the end, unto him will I give authority over the nations; 27 and he shall shepherd them with an iron rod, as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers, as I also have received of my Father: 28 and I will give unto him the morning star.

In these rewards of victory, there is a pointed allusion to many passages in the prophets which represent the nations as in rebellion against God and His Messiah King, until their rebellion is put down by His victorious power. The following is a single example:

> Why do the nations rage,
> And the peoples imagine a vain thing?
> The kings of the earth set themselves,
> And the rulers take counsel together,
> Against the Lord and against His Anointed:
> Let us break their bands asunder,
> And cast away their cords from us.
> He that sitteth in the heavens will laugh;
> The Lord will have them in derision.
> Then will He speak unto them in His wrath,
> And trouble them in His sore displeasure:
> Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.
> I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me,
> Thou art my Son,
> This day have I begotten thee.
> Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance,
> And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.
> Thou shalt shepherd them with a rod of iron;
> Thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel (Ps. ii. 1–9).

The Hebrew word here rendered to 'shepherd' has no authorized equivalent in our language, but its meaning is, to exercise the shepherd's functions: and so taken it contains a figure of speech which has the energy of contrast and surprise; for it expresses the idea that the Lord will shepherd the nations, not, as we should have anticipated, with the peaceful crook, but with an iron rod, with which He will dash them to shivers as a potter's vessel. And this terrible

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prophecy must needs be fulfilled by reason of the obdurate resistance of the nations to His authority, as 'the King of kings and Lord of lords' (15). Here, then, the assurance is given to 'them that overcome, and keep their Lord's works to the end,' that they shall be partakers with Him in this victorious warfare to subdue the nations, and in His authority over them which He receives from His Father. Hereafter we shall see those to whom this promise is made in His conquering army (Rev. xix. 14). This 'morning star,' which also shall be given them, is explained by the words of the Lord at the close of the book: "I am the root and offspring of David, the bright, the morning star" (Rev. xxii. 16); in allusion to 'the star that should come forth out of Jacob' (Num. xxiv. 17). Hence this gift to the conquerors in their earthly conflicts is that of the Lord Himself, in the brightness of His glory and reign over the subdued nations, as elsewhere it is said: "They shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Rev. xx. 6).

29 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (49).

The great practical truth of this Epistle, which is of universal interest, is the necessity of the purest Scriptural morality in the church. For, although we who live in Christian countries have no inducement or occasion to attend idolatrous feasts, through the all-transforming influence of our holy religion upon society at large, yet incessant temptations to immorality are the conditions of human life in all ages and all circumstances. Neither was the formulating of impurity in a doctrine to justify it peculiar to primitive times; for it has been said by a great poet and philosopher that 'men's lives are not so much the consequences of their doctrines as their doctrines are of their lives.' And such immoral doctrines are now taught by those scientists who deny that there is any such thing as an absolute morality; who maintain that the conscience, which, when rightly heard, is the voice of God in man,* is a mere

*See *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, iv.

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animal instinct, or the exercise of mere prudential wisdom. Nihilism has a doctrine to justify political assassination, and communism has a doctrine which casts contempt upon sexual purity, and maintains that we have nothing which we can properly call our own, not even our wives or children. The doctrine contained in all these and similar delusions of Satan is, that there can be no authority above men to prohibit them from doing whatever they have a mind to ; and this is one of their 'deep things.' Not long ago, a man rose in one of their conventions in the city of New York and said, 'If I were in heaven and felt disposed to commit sin, I would do it there.' Such is 'the liberty they promise to others, whilst they themselves are the slaves of corruption' (2 Pet. ii. 19). Now the church of Christ is the only power on earth that can make head against these immoral doctrines and practices ; and in order to do this, her members must keep themselves pure ; otherwise the embankment is broken down which God has raised against this overflowing scourge. Hence it is for all Christians, in their business, in their social, domestic, political, and church relations, ever to bear in mind and lay to heart these words of the Lord, 'I will give unto you, each one, according to your works,' in order that they may keep themselves 'unspotted from the world,' and may appear in the last day with that 'holiness without which no one shall see the Lord' (Heb. xii. 14).

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IX

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS THE CHURCH HAVING ONLY A NAME TO LIVE III 1–6

This church seems to have been generally regarded as in a prosperous condition, but in the eyes of her Lord she has only a name to live, and is spiritually dead: yet she also has a remnant who have kept themselves pure amidst abounding corruptions, and, in contrast with the church in Thyatira, she is earnestly admonished to repentance.

1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I know thy works, that thou hast a name to live and art dead.

Sardis was a very ancient and renowned city, about 30 miles eastward and further inland from Thyatira, on the head waters of the river Hermus where it is joined by the Pactolus, formerly celebrated for its golden sands. The surrounding country was prodigiously fertile, and would be still if it were properly cultivated. The city had been the capital of the ancient and powerful empire of Lydia, which was overthrown by the Persians under Cyrus the great about 550 years before Christ, when it was the residence of that famous monarch from whose enormous treasures the proverb, 'as rich as Crœsus,' has come down to us. It is said that gold and silver were first minted into coin at Sardis. It was conquered from the Persians by Alexander, and, at the time of these Epistles, was one of the chief cities of Proconsular Asia. At present, there are only a few straggling huts amidst the ruins of its ancient splendor, which still bear the name of Sart. These ruins are wonderful, and are regarded by antiquarians as

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coeval with Solomon's temple. The people bore an ill name for luxury and vice. Here, at any early day, a Christian church had been established, but by whose ministry, or who was its pastor at this time, we have no information. About 100 years afterwards, it had a very eminent pastor named Melito, who, on account of his spiritual character, was called by his contemporaries 'the prophet'; who addressed an elaborate defence of Christianity to the reigning pagan emperor, Marcus Aurelius; and who was the author of a commentary or treatise upon the Apocalypse, which unfortunately has been lost.

'Having the seven Spirits of God,' which the Lord here claims for Himself, does not appear in the opening vision, but in the greeting to the churches we have had that to which it refers (14), where we have seen that these seven Spirits are a symbolical expression signifying the Holy Spirit in the unity of His personality and fulness of His manifold operations. His 'having the seven stars,' however, occurs in that vision with a large significance (41). The reason why these particular traits are introduced here is, no doubt, that this church is in an extremely low spiritual state, yet not past all hope of restoration, which can come only from the fulness of the Spirit in her Lord, in connection with faithful pastoral labor. This has been admirably expressed as follows: 'To the angel or pastor of the church and his people, sunken in spiritual deadness and torpor, the lamp of faith waning and almost extinguished in their hearts, the Lord presents Himself as one having the fulness of all spiritual gifts, able, therefore, to revive, able to recover, able to bring back from the very gates of spiritual death, those who will employ the little last remaining strength which they still retain in calling even *in extremis* upon Him.'

The Lord knows all the works of this church, and that, having a name to live, she is spiritually dead. For outwardly she seems to have been in a flourishing condition. The rage of persecution does not seem to have reached her. There was, as we may well believe, no lack of union or harmony among her members, and no special forms of idol-

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atry or immorality that required the application of discipline. She was not troubled with heresies or false doctrines. Her creed seems to have been quite sound, perhaps a model of orthodoxy. Probably her members were numerous, and many of them wealthy. Hence she had a name to live, a renown for spiritual life, was regarded by her sister churches as a prosperous Christian community. There was nothing to trouble her repose; but, oh, it was the repose of spiritual death. She was a foolish virgin, asleep with no oil in her lamp (Mat. xxv. 1–13); she was an unfaithful steward, saying to herself, 'My Lord delayeth His coming' (Luke xii. 45–46); her heart surcharged with sloth and luxury.

2 Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found thy works perfect before my God.

These first words are an imperfect translation of the original, which some render 'Become watchful.' Their full sense is, 'Wake up and watch': and being awake and vigilant, she is first to strengthen the spiritual graces which she still has, and which, while she continued asleep, were about to die; for if they too shall perish, there will be no hope, perhaps no possibility of her recovery; she will be 'twice dead, and plucked up by the roots' (Jude 12). In what follows there is a figure of speech which is just the opposite of hyperbole, i. e. a feeble expression is chosen, one so manifestly inadequate to the sense intended that it calls forth a mental reaction to supply the deficiency, as when we say of a grossly immoral person, He is no saint, which evokes the response, Very far from it. Thus, 'I have not found thy works perfect,' is evidently intended to imply that they are very far from it: and this implication is further strengthened by the additional words, 'before my God'; for as Nimrod is said to have been 'a mighty hunter before the Lord' (Gen. x. 9), to signify his exceeding might, so here the meaning is, that the works of the church are as far as possible from being perfect. A contrast is implied also between the fairness of her character before men, in that she had a name to live, and her spiritual deadness in the sight of God. Hence

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she is so urgently called to wake up out of this deathly sleep, and to put herself on the watch, i. e. for her Lord's coming, and to strengthen her remaining graces. For the sparks of spiritual life which He sees in her ashes will soon be extinguished, unless she shall bestir herself to rekindle them. Thus also St. Paul strives to arouse spiritual sleepers: "Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light" (Eph. v. 14).

3 Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard, and keep it, and repent. If, therefore, thou dost not watch, I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

She is not left in any uncertainty as to what she must do to recover herself from her low estate; at least four things are explicitly enjoined upon her: (1) She is to 'remember how she has received and heard,' which is equivalent to received by hearing, as in the words, 'Faith cometh by hearing' (Rom. x. 17); in other words, she must recall to mind what faith and other spiritual blessings she formerly received by hearing the word read and the gospel preached, in order that she may become sensible of her loss, and of her sin in falling away. For, in this respect, her case is like that of the Ephesian church (47) whose rebukes and admonitions, therefore, she must take to herself: (2) She must 'keep,' or guard, or carefully watch over, that which she has so received, the things which remain to her, and which were ready to die, as her only hope of restoration to her former spiritual life and prosperity: (3) She must repent of her sin in falling away; not regarding it as a calamity for which she is not responsible, but as a grievous sin, for which there can be no excuse, nor palliation, and no forgiveness without sincere and deep repentance: (4) She must put herself on the watch for her Lord's coming; otherwise He will surely come upon her as a thief in the night, and she shall not know the hour of His coming; in which there is a plain allusion to the parable in which the words occur: "But this know ye, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered

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his house to be broken through. Therefore, be ye also ready, for in an hour that ye think not the Son of Man cometh" (Mat. xxiv. 43–51). And here again we see that His coming takes place at many different times, and is not limited to that of the millennium; for He came to this church, in fulfilment of this threat, long ago (50), because, as it seems, she did not give due heed to His admonitions. With respect to such daily and hourly visitations, moreover, it has been well said: 'To spiritual sleepers the Lord as judge always comes as a thief in the night; for they have lost all perception by their spiritual senses of the threatening signs of judgment: judgments upon whole congregations, as well as upon individual souls. Even though there may be an obscure presentiment of judgment, yet the nearness and very hour of it takes them by surprise. The hour is hidden from them in as strange a form as the coming of the thief at night.'

4 But thou hast a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white [robes], for they are worthy.

The judgments upon the church in general, if she shall be found still asleep at her Lord's coming, shall not reach to the few names, or persons, who have kept themselves pure, and whom He will certainly find watching. Of these it is said that they 'have not defiled their garments,' i. e. their characters; but this, of course, must be understood comparatively, in contrast with the many who were all defiled. Garments are the well-recognized symbol of character, or the state of the soul with respect to righteousness or unrighteousness, as in the prophets: "Take away the filthy garments from him. . . Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee (Zech. iii. 4).

> He hath covered me with the garments of salvation,
> He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Is. lxi. 10).

And white is the color of purity and victory (35). Consequently, this promise to the remnant in Sardis, that they shall 'walk with their Lord in white robes,' signifies that they shall be with Him whithersoever He may go, enjoying

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His perfect intimacy, as having obtained the victory over all their temptations, and been purified from all the defilements of sin. Hence they 'are worthy' of so great a reward. Thus we are assured that, whatever judgments He may inflict upon a church spiritually dead, He will always take good care of those in her communion who have not been engulfed in the general corruption.

5 He that overcometh, himself shall be clothed in white robes; and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; and I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels.

These white robes, as we have just seen, are the symbol of purity and victory. 'The book of life' frequently occurs in these visions, sometimes in the other Scriptures, and everywhere it is spoken of as containing the names of all those who shall be saved. Thus it is said that none shall enter into the New Jerusalem but 'they who are written in the Lamb's book of life' (Rev. xxi. 27). St. Paul mentions those "whose names are written in the book of life' (Phil. iv. 3). Our Lord tells His disciples to 'rejoice because their names are written in heaven' (Luke x. 20), which implies the book. In the prophets it is said: "A book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name: and they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make a peculiar treasure (Mal. iii. 16–17). Thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (Dan. xii. 1). In fact, it appears as early as the time of Moses, in his prayer for his people after they had sinned in the matter of the golden calf: "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold; yet now if thou wilt forgive their sin—and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." From these and other allusions to this book, we easily gather that it is the symbol of God's perfect knowledge of His people individually and by name; that He keeps them ever in remembrance, and that they are to Him a peculiar treasure; whereby their eternal life is infallibly secured. This assurance, moreover, is emphasized with great energy

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by the figure of speech that is employed in the words, 'I will not blot his name out of the book of life,' which is the same that has just been noticed (83), where a feeble expression suggests a strong one; for, interpreted by this figure, these words are as if it were said, His name is written in the book of life, and there assuredly it shall stand forever. In what follows concerning the confession of His name, there is a direct reference to the Lord's declaration: "Every one whosoever, therefore, that shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father who is in heaven, . . before the angels of God. But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father who is in heaven (Mat. x. 32), . . before the angels of God" (Luke xii. 8). For the public confession of Christ is of such importance, especially in times of persecution, that it has the effect of a sealing ordinance, whereby the assurance of salvation is imparted to the faithful confessor. Hence it was so precious to the martyrs that, sooner than withhold it, they joyfully laid down their lives (55).

6 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (49).

1. How far this church, having a name to live and being spiritually dead, is to be regarded as representative, or how much of what is said concerning her is generally applicable, we may not be able to determine. But, for some years past, the additions to the full communion of the church have not averaged more than five or six annually in the particular churches, and these have come almost exclusively from Christian families. This surely does not look like a flourishing or fruitful spiritual life. In fact, our normal condition seems to be that in which we regard ourselves as having declined from a higher degree of spiritual prosperity, for the constant burden of our prayers is for revivals. It seems plain, also, that such declensions, expressly charged upon two of these representative churches, those of Ephesus and Sardis, and necessarily implied in all the others except two, those of Smyrna and Philadelphia, must be understood

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to signify that they would prevail during a great part of the dispensation.

2. Here, then, if we find ourselves, whether as churches or individuals, in a state of declension, we have precious instructions what we must do to recover ourselves. We must wake up from our sleep of spiritual death, and put ourselves on the watch for our Lord's coming with great judgments upon spiritual sleepers, and with great manifestations of His grace and glory to all 'those who love His appearing' (2 Tim. iv. 8). We must recall to remembrance as vividly as we can what our state was 'when the lamp of God shined upon our heads' (Job xxix. 3); when we rejoiced in His presence as realized by faith; when converts flocked into the church 'as doves to their windows' (Is. lx. 8), numerous and bright as the drops of 'the morning dew' (Ps. cx. 3); for such memories are wholesome and profitable in many ways. We must strengthen the things that remain, and were about to die; rekindle the sparks that may still be discovered in the ashes of our spiritual life. But none of these things will or can be of any avail, nor, indeed, are any of them possible, without sincere repentance, deep humiliation before God, for our inexcusable sin in allowing ourselves to fall into such declension. All this implies, of course, that we strengthen ourselves in prayer, in the reading and hearing of the word, in the meetings for prayer and Christian communion, and in all the activities of Christian life.

3. But what is of greatest importance for us to lay to heart is, that we must do all these things for ourselves, not, indeed, without help from God, but with such help as we now possess. We are not to sit still and wait for a revival of religion, nor for any future outpouring of the Spirit, nor for any divine influence which we have not already received. For there is not a word here about anything but what we must do for ourselves; and all such waiting arises from a potent and prevalent delusion which lays the blame of our low estate upon God, instead of upon ourselves, as if we earnestly desired Him to pour out His Spirit upon us and revive us, but could not get Him to do it: whereas the truth is, that His Spirit was,

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once for all, copiously poured out upon the church, and 'upon all flesh' (Acts ii. 17), in the great Pentecostal affusion, and not one drop of that outpouring has ever been withdrawn. Ever since that day, it is as true as it was then, that 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal' (1 Cor. xii. 7). Hence there is not an allusion in the whole Bible to any subsequent outpouring of the Spirit, nor an intimation that the apostles, or Christians of those times, ever prayed for any such thing. They evidently believed that, once for all time, the Spirit had been poured out upon the church and, in a certain sense, upon the world, with all fulness of power and blessing, so that all they had to do was to count upon it by faith, and go forth to conquer the world. Therein precisely lay the secret of their enormous spiritual power and success (34): that faith was Samson's hair to them; whilst we, without it, and all the time striving to get God to do what He has already done, are as the Danite of old shorn of his hair.

3. Moreover, it is 'He who hath the seven spirits of God,' and who 'walketh in the midst of the churches' (81), who here calls us to repentance, and to the doing for ourselves of whatever is necessary for the revival and restoration of our spiritual life; so that this call itself is an ample guarantee of all the help from Him that we can possibly need; for He does not command us to make brick without stubble or straw. Thus again we are divinely admonished not to wait for God to do anything which He has not already done; but, in full reliance upon Him for whatsoever aid we can possibly need, to do for ourselves the things which He enjoins upon us, in order that we may be revived and restored to spiritual prosperity. For when we act as we would if we were revived, we are already in the midst of a revival. Thus, and not otherwise, will any revival ever come to us, and we be prepared for our Lord's coming. For surely He will come quickly to us all, in great mercy and blessing to those who wait, look, watch, and pray for, who love and hasten unto, His appearing; and with equally great judgments upon all whom He shall find with their hearts absorbed in luxury and worldliness, sunken in spiritual sloth, sleeping the sleep of spiritual death.

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X

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA THE CHURCH VICTORIOUS OVER HER ENEMIES III 7–13

In this Epistle, which is the sixth in the series, we have the portrait of a church without reproach, in a high state of spiritual prosperity: a charming picture.

7 And unto the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith the Holy, the True; who hath the key of David; who openeth, and no man shall shut, and who shutteth, and no man shall open.

Philadelphia was an inland city, about 25 miles in a south-easterly direction from Sardis. It was of comparatively recent origin, having been founded by Attalus Philadelphus, one of the later successors of Alexander. He called it after his own name Philadelphia, which, as is well known, signifies brotherly love, but without reference to the Christian idea, for the surname of its founder was not uncommon among the pagan Greeks. It was the last place in all Asia Minor to fall under the dominion of the Turks, who call it to this day, but for what reason I do not know, Allah-Shar, the city of God. It has now a population of about 15,000 souls, a considerable proportion of whom are Christians; also 5 churches, and the ruins of 24 others. One of its Turkish mosques is believed by the Christians of the place to be the same building in which the church of this Epistle worshipped, of which, however, there is no probability. The ruins are very remarkable, especially four noble pillars yet standing *in situ*, and bearing very ancient inscriptions. They formerly supported the dome of a great Christian church, and they strongly remind one of the promise in this Epistle: "He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple

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of my God . . and will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God . . and my new name." Of the founder of this church, and of its pastor at this time, we know nothing.

The Lord here claims to be 'the Holy' and 'the True' apparently with reference to the character of the Philadelphian Christians, whom He has hallowed or sanctified unto Himself, as His true people, in contrast with the false Jews, the synagogue of Satan, who have rejected Him, and thus alienated themselves from 'the commonwealth of Israel' (Eph. ii. 12). For by these claims He identifies Himself with 'the Holy One of Israel,' who spoke by all their prophets, and with the Messiah, 'the Holy One of God,' concerning whom they prophesied, and who is 'the true God and eternal life' (1 John v. 20). His 'having the key of David' seems to refer to the members of this church as being those whom He has received into His household, and whom He will receive into the New Jerusalem, in contrast with the unbelieving Jews, against whom He shuts the door. There is also in this expression a further reference to what had been said of Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who, in his pure and noble character, in his distinguished services as 'a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem,' and in his office as 'master of the king's household,' was an eminent type of Christ; in consequence of which, the Lord here applies to Himself the following words, which were originally spoken concerning this Eliakim: "The key of the house of David I will lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Is. xxii. 22): the keys of ancient locks being often very large, so that they were carried on men's shoulders. The house of David is the type of the church, the Lord's spiritual house, 'whose house are we' (Heb. iii. 6), of which He here claims to hold the key, with absolute authority to admit, or exclude, whomsoever He sees fit. The words are of great value, as showing that He has not delegated 'the power of the keys,' as it is called, to subordinates, whether apostles, pope, or priesthood, or St. Peter himself, in any such sense as to imply that He does not retain it in

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His own hands. Hence His words to St. Peter, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Mat. xvi. 19), and similar words to the other apostles, must be understood consistently with His continuing to hold these keys Himself. In fact, the words evidently contain a strong oriental hyperbole, such as is very common in the sayings of Christ, to signify that St. Peter and the other apostles should exert an immense influence in bringing people into the kingdom, and beyond this they are not to be pressed; for, taken in any literal sense, they would require us to believe that some in heaven are 'bound,' which is absurd. All that St. Peter, or the other apostles, could ever do, and all that the church can now do, by this power of the keys, is to be the Lord's instruments in opening the doors of the church to those whom He receives, and in shutting them against those whom He rejects. For it is only where human agency meets His approval that it is valid. In all other cases, it has no more efficacy than anything done by Simon Magus or Judas Iscariot. Hence it follows, which in our modern sectarianism is often lost sight of, that no branch of the church has any lawful authority to prescribe such doctrinal terms of communion as will exclude any of the Lord's true people, for this is to be guilty of the sin of schism. Hence the exceeding brevity and catholicity of the Apostles' Creed.*

8 I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee a door opened, and no man is able to shut it: [I know] that thou hast little strength, and hast held fast my word, and hast not denied my name.

These must all be understood as good works, since there is no rebuke. The 'door opened' seems to have a double reference: (1) to that by which the church herself, that is, her members, should enter into the future glories of the kingdom, to 'the marriage supper of the Lamb' (Rev. xix. 9), the door of which is here set open before her by the Bride-

* See *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, xiii.

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groom Himself, and no one is able to shut it: (2) to that by which she should bring others into the kingdom, which is, in fact, the same door, as in the words of St. Paul: "I will tarry at Ephesus . . for a great and effectual door has been opened unto me, and there are many adversaries" (1 Cor. xvi. 8); also, in the following: "They rehearsed all things that God had done by them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the gentiles" (Acts xiv. 37). This latter sense of the opened door is further confirmed by the success promised to the church in subduing her enemies. Her feebleness seems to refer, not at all to her spiritual state, but to the fewness of her members, and the inadequateness of her means and instrumentalities, in comparison with the numbers and wealth of the Jewish synagogue with which she had to contend. For the fact, that, in those times of persecution, she had held fast to her Lord's word, and to the confession of His name, with a fidelity which merited such praise from Him, is evidence of very great spiritual strength.

9 Behold, I do give [them] of the synagogue of Satan, who say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie —— behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and they shall know that I have loved thee.

We learn from this that there were in Philadelphia, as in Smyrna (57), those who claimed to be, and, no doubt, were Jews, either by descent, or as proselytes, but who, from their bitter enmity to the cross and people of Christ, were no longer of the true Israel, but rather a synagogue of Satan. By the way, this treatment of the Lord and His church by the Jews was the origin of that subsequent persecution of them by Christians with which the history of the world is darkened, and which has not yet ceased. It is remarkable also that the Mohammedans have always been as bitter persecutors of them as the Christians themselves, and they give the same reason for it, namely, their murder of Jesus, whom all Islam regards as a great prophet. In America, it never had any place, and it has nearly ceased in all Protestant countries. Of course, there can be no justification of it.

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The most that can be said in palliation is, that such persecution originated with the 'Christ-killers' themselves, whose hatred continues to this day, so that the most zealous among them spit when His name is mentioned. In the promise here given, that they shall be made to come and worship at the feet of the church, there seems to be a double prophecy: (1) of the humiliation they were destined to suffer from Christians, whom they were then persecuting with such blind fury; (2) of their conversion to Christianity; for as the ingathering of the gentiles is often represented in the prophets under the image of their doing homage and paying tribute to Zion, so here under a similar image the conversion of the Jews seems to be foreshadowed. This prediction is still further emphasized by the words, 'and they shall know that I have loved thee,' as if He had said: I will make them to know that the Christian church, and not the Jewish synagogue, is the object of my love; and such knowledge almost necessarily implies their conversion. Moreover, since they are the last enemies to be subdued by grace, according to the statement, 'A hardness hath befallen Israel in part, until the fulness of the gentiles be come in' (Rom. xi. 25), we have in this prophecy, as in many others, a divine assurance that the church shall ultimately triumph over all her enemies, which, indeed, is the leading idea of the Epistle: nor should we fail to recall here the words of the prophet to which there is a pointed allusion:

> The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee;
> And all they that despised thee shall bow themselves at the soles of thy feet (Is. lx. 14).

10 Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which must come upon the whole world to tempt them that dwell upon the earth.

Here the church is still furthur commended, and receives an additional promise in reward of her fidelity. For the word of the Lord's patience, or endurance, is doubtless that of the gospel in general, but with special reference to His declaration: "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 27); for in such

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cross-bearing this church has been conspicuously patient; in gracious recognition of which He now gives her this assurance, that He will keep her from being swept away by the judgments that are coming upon all the world for the temptation, or trial, of its inhabitants: and in fulfilment of this promise the church of Philadelphia seems never to have become extinct.

11 I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

This is another indication of the nature of the Lord's coming (85); for the words, 'I come quickly,' evidently refer to the hour of temptation, which was imminent; such times of trial being one way in which He manifests Himself for the purpose of sifting His people out of the world, and of perfecting their faith and patience. This crown is 'the crown of life' (59) the church's reward of victory over her enemies and her temptations to apostasy and to declension in piety; but she must continue to hold fast what she has attained, or she will yet forfeit her crown.

12 He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall no more go out of it; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God, and my new name.

The symbolism of the temple is naturally very rich and varied. Its fundamental idea is that of the peculiar dwelling place of God; whence it comes to signify the church, or His people, in whom He dwells; and it continues to bear one or other of these symbolical meanings until it is superseded by the New Jerusalem. The church is the spiritual temple of God, as in the words: "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? . . . The temple of God is holy, which temple ye are" (1 Cor. iii. 16–17). Hence this promise to the conqueror is, that he shall be made a pillar in this spiritual temple, i. e. one of its chief supports and ornaments, but especially a fixture; this last idea being emphasized by the additional words, 'and he shall no more

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go out of it.' Also, the Lord will write upon him, still conceived of under the image of a pillar, the name of His God; as we shall see hereafter that His people have His Father's name sealed on their foreheads, to denote that they belong to Him, and that He has taken possession of their faculties and powers. Moreover, the Lord will write upon him the name of the city of His God, New Jerusalem, to signify that he shall be a partaker of all the beatitudes and glories of that everlasting dwelling place of God and the Lamb. Its descent from heaven will require to be fully considered in the sequel. Finally, the Lord will write upon the conqueror his own new name, probably 'the Word of God,' which is first applied to Him in the writings of St. John, to signify that he shall be a possessor of Christ as the manifestation of God to his own soul, and shall become thereby such a manifestation to others. The frequent repetition here by the Lord Jesus of the words, 'my God,' should be carefully noted, in order to guard against the error which merges and obscures the worship of the Father in that of the Son. We should worship Him whom Jesus Christ worshipped.

13 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (49).

The several points of instruction and consolation in this Epistle, which can never lose their interest for the Lord's people, are such as the following:

1. This is the second of these typical and representative churches for which the Lord has no rebuke, only praise; which re-emphasizes the great lesson (60), that it is practicable for us so to live that He will have no need to speak to us any but the most comforting words. For He is not a hard master; "His commandments are not grievous (1 John v. 3). Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him; For He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust (Ps. ciii. 13–14). And I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal. iii. 17).

2. In several of these Epistles, besides those which con-

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tain no rebukes, there are abundant expressions of commendation and praise; which reveals a trait of the Lord's character often lost sight of, namely, that He delights to praise His people, rather than to rebuke them, whenever it can be done with safety. For we cannot understand that the members of this church were faultless (61); but they were in that state in which commendation would be more efficacious than censure, or chastisement, to strengthen their faith and perfect their piety. He resorts to severity only where He sees that praise would be misunderstood, and would do harm: in all which, He sets a lovely example to parents, pastors, teachers, and masters, in the treatment of their children and people.

3. Our dear Lord knows how little strength we have, and makes provision for us according to our need. Hence the fewness of our numbers, our poverty in this world's goods, the feebleness of our means and appliances to influence the great world around us, are no reasons for discouragement, even in the greatest undertakings; for it is not by human power or wisdom that anything is accomplished in the upbuilding of His kingdom: "Not by an army, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts (Zech. iv. 6). Not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, that He might put to shame them that are wise, and . . the weak things of the world, that He might put to shame the things that are strong; and the base things of the world, and the things that are despised . . and the things that are not, that He might bring to nought the things that are" (1 Cor. i. 26–28). It was in this faith that the pious king Asa cried unto God against the innumerable host of the Ethiopians: "Lord, there is none like thee to help between the mighty and him that hath no strength" (2 Chron. xiv. 11); and by this faith he conquered. Thus the Lord said to His few illiterate disciples: "The field is the world (Mat. xiii. 38). Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. And, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (xxviii. 19–20). This great truth is exemplified also in the whole

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history of His church and gospel. Let us remember, then, whenever we are tempted to discouragement from such feebleness, His blessed words, 'I know thou hast little strength,' that we may be able to say with holy Paul: "When I am weak, then am I strong (2 Cor. xii. 10). I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13).

4. Here again we are admonished against declension in piety (51); for this admonition is several times repeated and insisted on (88); which strongly emphasizes our proneness to such declensions and the great evil of them. The reason of this is, that they put our salvation in jeopardy; and the Lord's grace is something too costly and precious to be carelessly lost without great guilt. Hence our holding fast what we have attained is the indispensable condition of obtaining our crown. In fact, such declension is always a state bordering on final apostasy: "For it is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, and fall away, to renew them again unto repentance, seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to open shame" (Heb. vi. 4–6).

5. We have here prescribed the way in which we shall be kept by our Lord in every hour of temptation; shall overcome all our enemies, and be the means of the salvation of many: this is, that with patient endurance we hold fast His word, and the confession of His name (64); "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom. x. 10). The individual soul that shall continue thus faithful shall be made a pillar in the temple of God, and upon him shall be written indelibly the name of God, the name of the holy city of God, and his Lord's new name; and when the church at large shall come to have this character, all her enemies will come to worship at her feet, being made to know that she is the beloved of the Lord with an inalienable love.

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XI

EPISTLE TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA THE LUKEWARM CHURCH III 14–22

This is the seventh and last of the Epistles, and it closes the first series of these revelations. It represents the church in a state of lukewarm piety, and threatens her with reprobation. But her case is not hopeless, for she is carefully instructed how to recover herself, and her rebukes are softened with gracious assurances that they proceed from the love of her Lord.

14 And unto the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

Laodicea was situated about 10 miles from Philadelphia, and 40 from Ephesus; for all these cities were included within a parallelogram of 40 by 60 miles; so densely populous was that beautiful country before it was devastated by the Mohammedan conquests. This city, under another name, had been quite destroyed by an earthquake, and rebuilt by Antiochus Theos, one of the Seleucid successors of Alexander, who re-named it after his queen Laodice. It soon became very populous and wealthy; for when it was again destroyed by an earthquake, in the reign of Nero 35 or 40 years before this Epistle, it was entirely rebuilt more splendidly than before by the wealth of its own citizens. It is nothing now but a heap of ruins. This church was already in existence when St. Paul wrote his Epistle to the Christians at Colossæ, another city not more than 10 miles from Laodicea, wherein he says: "I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh (Col. ii. 1).

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Salute the brethren who are at Laodicea. . . . And when this Epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that ye also read the Epistle from Laodicea" (iv. 15–16), i. e. the one which they should obtain from that church. Hence it has been supposed that he had written a letter to the Laodiceans which is now lost; but more probably he refers to his Epistle to the Ephesians, which, there is good reason to believe, was a circular letter addressed to several churches, among which this at Laodicea may have been one.

The Lord calls Himself 'the Amen' in the sense that He is the truth itself, for this is a Hebrew word which has that signification, and it occurs where God is spoken of as 'the God of truth' (Is. lxv. 16). Here it may contain a reference also to the following: "I am the way and the truth and the life (John xvi. 6). In Him is the yea, and in Him is the amen" (1 Cor. i. 20). 'The faithful witness' has occurred before in the greeting to the churches (15), and here 'true' is added, for truthfulness is a consequence of faithfulness in witness-bearing. And surely it is one of the greatest things that we have the witnessing of the Lord Himself to these and all the revelations of the spiritual world upon which our salvation depends; for since He certainly does not mean to deceive, and cannot Himself be deceived, all things must be as He represents them. But in what sense does He call Himself 'the beginning of the creation of God'? Here we must bear in mind that this word has several meanings, among which are the two following, which require to be sharply discriminated: (1) the first part of anything, as the twilight hour is the beginning of the day: (2) that from which anything originates as its cause, as the sun's rising is the beginning of the day: and that it is to be taken here, not in the former, but in the latter sense, is evident from the proem of St. John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made" (John i. 1–3): for in no sense can the Creator of all things be a part of the creation. Christ, as to

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the substance of His divine nature, is one with the Father; as to His divine personality, He is eternally 'begotten, not made, very God of very God' (72). The whole of this introduction is obviously intended to impress the conviction that what is contained in the Epistle is the truth of God which none can neglect but at their own peril.

15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot: 16 so, because thou art lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spew thee out of my mouth:

This is one of the most terrible rebukes in the whole Scripture; although this lukewarmness of the church is not an utter destitution of spiritual life, but rather a lack of zeal, a feeble realization of divine things, indifference to the realities of eternity; in which her sins, her obligations, the love of God, the sacrifice of Christ, heaven and hell, make no adequate or suitable impression upon her, but she yields herself to worldly and carnal indulgences. The words, 'I would thou wert cold or hot,' are not to be taken in their literal or strongest sense, but rather as a figurative expression of the offensiveness of this state; which is still further emphasized by the loathsome image whereby the Lord threatens her with rejection and reprobation, unless she shall repent and reform. In similar strong figures, but with more particularity, her spiritual state is described in what immediately follows.

17 Because thou sayest, I am rich and increased with goods and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked: 18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold purified with fire, that thou mayest be rich, and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear, and eye-salve to anoint thine eyes, that thou mayest see.

The word 'Because' here may have reference either to the preceding threat, or to the following 'counsel,' and possibly to both. In the former case, what immediately follows is to be understood as a further unfolding of 'lukewarm'; in the

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latter, it expresses the reason for this counsel. The general idea is, that the church is in a wretched and pitiable state of spiritual destitution, and does not know it, but regards herself with complacency. From the forms of expression used it is probable that her self-complacency was connected with worldly wealth and outward prosperity, in strong contrast with the temporal poverty and spiritual riches of the church in Smyrna (56). In the words, 'I counsel thee,' there is the same figure of speech that has occurred twice before (87), in which a feeble expression is chosen to suggest a strong one, as we sometimes say to disobedient servants, I advise you not to do so any more. Gold is a symbol of the preciousness of the graces of salvation (33), and here apparently with special reference to faith purified by the endurance of temptation, as in the following: "Ye have been put to grief in manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, more precious than gold which perisheth, and it is tried with fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the unveiling of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i. 6–7). This faith, which is the only true riches because it brings us into possession of all the treasures of heaven, the church is to obtain from her Lord: "For by grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph. ii. 8). And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith" (Luke xvii. 5). From Him also she must obtain these 'white garments,' which represent the purity and victory of those who overcome their temptations (85). Thus clothed, or purified, the shame of her nakedness will be covered, i. e. her sin of lukewarmness will be forgiven. For the shame of the naked body is the symbol of the spiritual shame of sin, and the covering of nakedness signifies the forgiveness of sin, as in the words:

> Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven
> Whose sin is covered * (Ps. xxxii. 1).

In fine, this anointing for the eyes is the symbol of illumination by the Holy Spirit, as elsewhere it is said: "Ye have

* For a more full elucidation of these interesting symbols see *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, viii.

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an anointing from the Holy One. . . . His anointing teacheth you concerning all things" (1 John ii. 20–27). These admonitions are for the purpose of awakening in the church the feeling of spiritual want, and of directing her to the only source from which it can be supplied. Moreover, in this energetic counsel to 'buy' these precious things of her Lord, there is another figure of speech, which implies that they are above all price, as in the prophet: "Come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat; yea, come buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Is. lv. 1). This is the buying that is here intended; for spiritual blessings are priceless, and must be received as a free gift, or they cannot be received at all.

19 As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent.

Thus the church is tenderly reminded that her Lord's love is not yet alienated, and that His rebukes and chastisements are its fruits and evidences: a lesson so precious that it is much insisted on, as in the following words: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth" (Heb. xii. 5–6). But this love of her Lord must become to her an all-constraining motive to repentance for her sin of lukewarmness, and to the renewal of her zeal for His glory; otherwise His rebukes will cease to be the tokens of love, and will become evidences of reprobation.

20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.

A gracious assurance this, that the Lord has not withdrawn from His church, but still waits to be gracious; for He is very patient and long-suffering, longing to receive back to His arms the penitent soul, as represented at large in the parable of the Prodigal (Luke xv. 11–32). Here also there is a significant allusion to 'the Song of Songs':

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It is the voice of my Beloved, who knocketh:
Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one;
For my head is filled with the dew,
My locks with the drops of the night. . . .
I opened to my Beloved;
But my Beloved had turned away, and was gone. . . .
I sought Him, but I could not find Him;
I called Him, but He gave me no answer (Cant. v. 2-6).

Recalling this reference, which, by the way, is an indorsement of the Canonicity of that charming symbolical poem, the church would be tenderly reminded that the Lord was still her celestial Bridegroom, and be admonished to hasten her repentance and response to His knocking, lest He should withdraw, and she should not be able to find Him. Here also we should recall His words: "If a man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23); for the indwelling of Christ in the souls of His people includes that of the whole Trinity. But with this fulness of manifestation He cannot abide in the lukewarm soul, who does not feel her need of Him, nor keep His word, and has no fervor of zeal or love. It is only when she experiences that 'aching void' which nothing else can fill; when she truly repents of all her sin-wandering; when she hears Him knocking at the door of her heart, and pleading for admission; when she hastens to open the door with a joyful welcome, it is only then that He comes in and sups with her, and she with Him; then He becomes both her guest and her host; He abides in the very centre of her life and consciousness. Henceforth it is not she that lives, but Christ that lives in her (Gal. ii. 20). With festive joy He takes up His permanent abode with His beloved soul, and her delight in His manifested presence and love is 'a joy unspeakable and full of glory' (1 Pet. i. 8), for this is 'the marriage supper of the Lamb.'

21 He that overcometh, unto him will I give to sit with me in my throne, as I also overcame, and sat with my Father in His throne.

This is the seventh and last of these rewards of victory, and it is beyond comparison the most wonderful of them all.

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I shall not undertake to interpret it in particulars, for I do not know how much it may signify; nor, indeed, can this ever be known otherwise than through experience, for it is written: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him (1 Cor. ii. 9). And it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is: and every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John iii. 2).

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches (49).

The great practical lesson of this Epistle is, that lukewarmness in piety is loathsome to our Lord; and there are so many reasons for it, reasons of such overwhelming force, that the wonder is, we can ever tolerate it in ourselves. For in this state we have little or no sense of the evil of sin, nor of the worth of the soul, nor of the obligations of grace, nor of anything that pertains to life and godliness; none of these things, nor all of them together, make any suitable impression upon our minds; we have no just appreciation of the love of God in giving His only begotten Son to die for us, nor of the self-sacrifice of Christ in bearing our sins on the cross: but we think we can be saved by looking upon Him afar off, i. e. with little or no fellowship or sympathy with His sufferings; without being crucified with Him to the selfish and worldly life; without any great sacrifice on our part for the cause for which He lived and taught and suffered and died. What we can give of our means without feeling it we may give; what we can do without effort we may do: but as for giving ourselves and being devoted to it, as He gave and devoted Himself, we do not even understand what this means. We think He gave Himself to save us from the necessity of giving ourselves; that He was crucified to save us from being crucified together with Him, and that we might be free to secure for ourselves as much as possible of the wealth and pleasures of this world. And we are mostly in-

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sensible to the enormous evil of all this. Sunken in the depths of spiritual poverty, we think we are rich and increased with goods; blind, we think we see; naked, so that all who can see are ashamed for us, we are not ashamed for ourselves. Such is the evil of this spiritual state that it is here represented as worse, in a certain sense, than coldness, or entire destitution of life. For he who is altogether without piety is more easily reached and convinced of his sin or danger than he who thinks he has much, 'and knows not that he is wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.' Such, moreover, are commonly backsliders, who are the hardest of all to be reached by the Lord's grace: "For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein and overcome, their last state is worse than the first; for it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them; but it has happened unto them according to the proverb: "The dog has turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that has been washed to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Pet. ii. 20–22). Nor is it a little remarkable that we have here the same loathsome image, though in a modified form, which is used in our Epistle to express the character of lukewarmness.

Thus we have seen what sevenfold reward (14) was promised to the Christians of the first ages who should come off conquerors in their spiritual warfare; and, indeed, it seems impossible to add anything to these promises; by which, no doubt, the faith and patience of the confessors and martyrs of those times were confirmed and perfected, so that 'they counted not their lives dear unto themselves' (Acts xx. 24), and attained to a success in their ministry of the gospel and witness-bearing which has never since been equalled (31). And since these seven churches represent the church in all ages, it is for us, no less than it was for them, to lay hold by faith upon these promises, that we thereby may be enabled to conquer as they did. For our need is no less than was

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theirs, though our temptations are different (32). We have to maintain an incessant warfare, not, indeed, against persecution, but against the more dangerous enemies, sloth, pride, vanity, avarice, ambition, sensuality, worldliness, immorality, and selfishness, in all their hydra-headed forms (31). We live in an age of scepticism and general unbelief. Science itself, in a false and materialistic development, has become a greater enemy to faith (79) and a greater temptation to apostasy than persecution ever was. It is safe to say that Satan has never made a more deadly assault upon the constancy of God's people than that which he is now making through the prevalence of scientific scepticism. We shall see hereafter that it is the beast out of the abyss which slays the Lord's two witnesses (Rev. xi. 7). For how should the faculty of science in man, which has proved itself to be so prodigiously sharp-sighted and far-seeing in the development of industry, wealth, and worldly civilization; how should it be utterly blind to spiritual and divine things? That is a question which multitudes now find themselves unable to answer, and hence they are swept away into the gulf of unbelief. We need all the help we can get to resist and overcome this dire temptation; just that help, indeed, which is so graciously and bountifully provided for us in these 'exceeding great and precious promises, whereby we are made partakers of a divine nature, and escape the corruption that is in the world through lust' (2 Pet. i. 4). Let us feed upon them, that we may be strengthened with might in the inner man, may fight manfully the good fight of faith, and may come off more than conquerors through Him who hath loved us and given Himself for us (Rom. viii. 37).

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XII

VISION OF GOD AND OF THE CREATION WORSHIPPING THE CREATOR IV 1–11

This vision is introductory to the second series of these revelations, those of the seven-sealed book, which are of a more profound and mystical character. We pass now from the conflicts and trials of the church to a vision of God upon His eternal throne, surrounded by the heavenly host, the spiritual powers which emanate from Him and permeate the material and moral universe : a vision so wonderful that we can almost say with the prophets: "I saw the Lord sitting upon His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him, on His right hand and on His left (1 Ki. xxii. 19). I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up. . . . About Him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings : with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts : the whole earth is full of His glory" (Is. vi. 1–3). In this heaven-scene, the whole creation, as seen from the heavenly point of view, is unveiled, and we behold it unceasingly engaged in the worship of its Creator ; thus presenting the grand ideal that is to be perfectly realized at the final coming of the Lord and the crowning establishment of His blessed kingdom.

1 After these things, I saw, and, behold, a door set open in heaven, and the first voice that I heard as of a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up hither, and I will show thee what things shall be hereafter.

An interval seems to have elapsed after the preceding visions, perhaps a week, to the next Lord's Day, in order to rest the mind of the Seer, and to give him time to write the

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Epistles to the churches. Now, therefore, he sees a door set open in heaven, and hears the same trumpet voice which he has heard before (28), calling him to come up into heaven, and promising to show him things that shall be hereafter. For the beautiful ideals which are now to be presented will not attain to perfect realization until the work of redemption and 'restoration of all things' (Acts iii. 21) shall be accomplished. But he is to ascend into heaven that he may see them as they cannot be made to appear from any other point of view.

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit: and, behold, a throne set in heaven, and One seated upon the throne: and He that sat was to the sight like unto a jasper stone and a sardius; and round about the throne a rainbow to the sight like unto an emerald.

As soon as he hears the voice, he falls into an ecstasy (26), and finds himself in heaven. Naturally the first object he beholds is God upon His eternal throne, whose form is not described, yet there can be no doubt but that it is the human form, the most perfect symbol of Him in whose image man was created, and which the Lord took upon Himself in His incarnation. His throne is the symbol of His sovereignty, power, dominion, and His being seated upon it, which is emphasized by repetition, denotes His possession of all government, and that it costs Him no effort, but is maintained and exercised as by one sitting at his ease. Moreover, His throne is mentioned 12 times in this vision, and 12 is the number of absoluteness or completeness, to and from which nothing can be added and nothing taken away, as in that of the patriarchs, the tribes, the apostles, the jewels in the high priest's breastplate, the foundation stones, gates, and pearls in the New Jerusalem. Very great stress is laid upon this idea of the government of God in these visions and throughout the Scriptures. To the dazzled sight of the Seer God appears like a jasper stone and a sardius; by the former of which, there is good reason to understand, the diamond is meant, since it is elsewhere called 'the most precious of all stones' (Rev. xxi. 11); which, also, as being the most incor-

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ruptible of all material things, and, as it were, essential light, as luminous by night as by day, is the best symbol that could have been chosen to represent the incorruptible essence and essential glory of 'Him who is light, and in Him is no darkness at all' (1 John v. 6). The sardius seems best understood as a soft-red or flesh-colored stone, by which the intense brilliancy of the diamond is mitigated, in order to symbolize the human and compassionate character and tenderness of God. It was the first, as the diamond was the last, of the 12 jewels in the mystical breastplate of the high priest (Ex. xxviii. 17–20); which seems to intimate that the human element of the divine character must be the first object of our knowledge, and that it is only through this that we can come to know God in the full blaze of His essential glory. The mention here of the first and last of these precious stones implies the whole series, which represented the infinitely perfect and precious nature and attributes of God. Upon each of them, moreover, was engraved the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel, to signify that they were inseparably identified with His attributes and glory. The symbolism of precious stones, however, will require to be more fully considered when we come to the foundations of the Golden City. In fine, the rainbow encircling the throne, in which the green of the emerald is predominant, which, as in nature, is the softest of all colors to the eye, by which also its powers of vision are healed and strengthened, is the symbol of God's covenant faithfulness in the administration of His government and grace, as in the token and seal of His covenant with Noah, that the earth should no more be destroyed by a deluge (Gen. ix. 13–17).

4 And round about the throne were four and twenty thrones, and seated upon the thrones [I saw] four and twenty elders, clothed in white robes, and crowns of gold upon their heads.

Among all the diverse interpretations which have been given of this obscure symbol, I greatly prefer that of the American editor of Lange's Commentary, namely, that these throned and crowned elders represent those 'Thrones, Domin-

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ions, Principalities, and Powers' of which St. Paul speaks (Col. i. 16), i. e. the angelic powers through whom God administers, to a certain extent at least, His government of the universe. For this interpretation seems best to harmonize with all that is said about them, and it is confirmed by a passage in one of the prophets, where such angelic natures are called 'ancients,' or elders (Is. xxiv. 23). Accordingly they have crowns upon their heads, and sit on thrones in the inmost circle around the central throne (109), to denote that next under God they exercise the functions of government; their crowns are of gold, to signify the excellence and preciousness of their governmental ministry (33); they are clothed in white robes, to represent their sinless purity, and their victory over temptation (85), when the angels 'who kept not their own government' fell from heaven (Jude 6). There are 24 or twice twelve of them, in allusion to the 12 patriarchs and the 12 apostles, the spiritual princes of the Lord's kingdom, things on earth being taken as representative of things in heaven, to denote the completeness of their number and functions (109).

5 And out of the throne go forth lightnings and voices and thunders; and before the throne seven lamps of fire are burning, which are the seven Spirits of God:

Lightning is 'the fire of God' (Job i. 16), thunder is 'the voice of the Almighty' (xxxvii. 51), and these 'voices' may be taken as, in some sort, interpretative of the other two, to signify that by them God speaks an intelligible language to His intelligent creatures. As proceeding from His throne, and in consideration of other passages where they are introduced (Rev. viii. 5; xvi. 18), I think they should be understood as representing the forces of nature in general; for these forces are not to be conceived of as the properties of matter, nor as entities in themselves, but as the intelligent energy of the divine will.* In fact, this conception of them underlies all the personifications of poetry, which is often more philosophical than philosophy, and it is of great

* See *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, i.

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importance to the right understanding of the mysteries both of nature and of grace. With respect to these 'lamps,' we have here another instance in which symbols of fundamental significance are authoritatively interpreted for us (40), these as representing 'the seven Spirits of God,' i. e. as we have seen, the Holy Spirit in the unity of His personality and fulness of His manifold operations (14). Thus also He was symbolized in the seven-branched candelabrum which stood before the veil of the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, within which was the shekinah, or luminous presence of God, as here these lamps stand 'before' the throne, in allusion to the mysterious distinction between God and His Spirit (14). The lamps are perpetually burning, to signify that He is the unfailing source of spiritual light, both as the inspirer of the divine word, which 'men spoke from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit' (2 Pet. i. 21), and as the interior enlightener of human souls.

6 And before the throne, as it were a glassy sea like unto crystal.

This glassy sea, notwithstanding its crystalline transparency, is anything but a transparent symbol. It will occur hereafter mingled with fire (Rev. xv. 2), as something through which the saved have passed, and on the shore of which they stand with the harps of God in their hands. The sea, however, without any qualifying word, both in these visions and elsewhere, is the well-recognized symbol of national life in its stormy perturbations and surging violence, of which we shall have abundant evidence in the sequel. Here, being as smooth as glass and transparent as crystal, it lies spread out to an infinite distance, as I think we must conceive of it, before the throne of God. Taking all these things into consideration, I suggest that it is intended to symbolize human life in general, especially in its relations to the divine providence, as having subdued its stormy agitations to a state of perfect peace and serenity. Thus interpreted, the sea, by its crystalline transparency, represents that the life of mankind, which from the earthly point of view is an unfathomable thraldom, altogether opaque and incomprehensible to human

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wisdom, is, from the heavenly standpoint of the Seer (109), transparent as crystal, a solved mystery. Thus, also, the symbol constitutes a prophecy of what shall be hereafter, when the Lord shall have fully established His kingdom on earth, and all the nations shall have submitted themselves to His peaceful reign.

6 And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes before and behind: 7 and the first living creature is like unto a lion; and the second living creature is like unto a bullock; and the third living creature hath the face of a man; and the fourth living creature is like unto a flying eagle: 8 and the four living creatures have each six wings: all around and within they are full of eyes; and they cease not by day or by night, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is, and who is to come.

Here also we naturally have an almost endless diversity of interpretations, though it seems plain enough that this wonderful symbol must be understood as a representation of the wisdom and power of God in nature, and, hence, of nature itself, but with special reference to living creatures, in which these divine attributes are most conspicuously manifested. It is very difficult, however, to form a distinct mental picture of that which was presented to the eye of the Seer, for how could these creatures be seen 'in the midst of the throne' and 'round about the throne,' at the same time? Many attempts have been made to solve this difficulty, which is one of very rare occurrence in these visions, where the distinctness of the imagery and word-painting is absolutely unrivaled; but after having examined most of them, I am still unable to form a clear conception of what is here described. Hence I am disposed to take the words, 'in the midst of the throne,' in a highly figurative sense, to denote (1) that what the creatures represent is something in God, i. e. His wisdom and power as manifested in nature; (2) that the ideas of all mundane creatures are eternally in His mind: whilst the forms in which they are realized are distinct from Him, and encircle His throne; for thus the true and Scriptural relations of the creation to the Creator would be admirably repre-

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sented. The creatures are four in number in order to represent nature in its grand totality, since four, in the Scriptural language of symbols, signifies the whole world, with reference to its four quarters, as in the words of the Lord: "They shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" (Luke xiii. 29). They are called ζῷον and ζῶα, from which we have zoölogy, the science of living creatures, to denote that the powers of nature are essentially vital forces, which attain to their crowning results in organized beings. All such beings are here represented in four vast generalizations, not, indeed, those of modern science, which would have been unintelligible at the time, and no less at this day to all but scientists, but in popular language which all can understand; and each of these classes is represented by the noblest of its kind. The first is that of the beasts of prey, the creature like a lion; the second, that of the domesticated and useful animals, the creature like a bullock; the third, that of human beings regarded simply as a part of creation or nature, the creature with the face of a man; the fourth, that of birds, the creature like a flying eagle. Taken together, they may represent the kind of service which is most acceptable to God, namely, that of courage and strength, docility and usefulness, intelligence, clearness of vision, and high aims. Moreover, each of these symbolical creatures has six wings, which identifies them, at least in part, with the seraphim in Isaiah's vision, which has been referred to (108); and the burden of their song, with which they unceasingly celebrate the holiness of God, as well as the general meaning of both visions, is nearly the same; as such, therefore, we may regard the position of their wings. With twain they cover their faces to express their humility, reverence, as being unworthy to look upon the splendors of the divine holiness: with twain they cover their feet, all the lower and least honorable parts of their bodies, as unworthy to appear in the presence of the Holy One: and with twain, expanded and quivering as for flight, they signify their eagerness to execute His holy commands. Moreover, 'around and within, before and be-

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hind,' i. e. all over their bodies, even under their wings, 'they are full of eyes'; which vividly represents that intelligence, knowledge, wisdom, of which the eye is the ever-recurring symbol (36), and which pervades the whole creation, but which is most conspicuously manifested in organic nature. For since the natural forces are the intelligent energy of the divine will, we can say, with hardly a figure of speech, that the eye knows how to see, the ear to hear, the stomach to digest its food, what to appropriate and what to reject; and so of all the other organs, functions, and operations of the vital forces in nature; nor in these alone, but also in all the manifold correlations and adaptations of part to part and of means to ends we see intelligence and wisdom which are unmistakably divine: all which is here symbolized in the most picturesque and expressive manner by these life-forms covered all over with eyes. In fine, the only difference between the song of these seraphim and that of Isaiah's vision is, that for 'the Lord of hosts' and 'the whole earth is full of His glory' there, we have here 'Lord God Almighty (23), who was, and who is, and who is to come.' The leading ideas are the same in both, namely, that nature is one blazing manifestation of the divine perfections, and is never weary in celebrating above all the divine holiness.

9 And when the living creatures shall give glory and honor and thanks unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, unto Him that liveth forever and ever, 10 the four and twenty elders shall fall down before Him that sitteth upon the throne, and shall worship Him that liveth forever and ever, and shall cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 11 Worthy art thou, O Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for thou hast created all things, and by reason of thy will they were, and were created.

The peculiar forms of expression here are probably to be understood as if it were said, It is ordained that they 'shall give' and 'shall fall down' and 'shall worship,' with reference to the unceasing repetition of these acts. The falling down of the elders from their thrones expresses the profound and intense character of their worship, and their casting their crowns before the throne of God signifies that

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they hold all their dignities and authority from Him. There is a manuscript variation, however, in the words of their song, for in some authorities it reads, 'by reason of thy will they were not, and were created.' If this be adopted, the meaning is, because God so willed it there was for a time no creation, and afterwards, because He so willed it, all things were created. If the reading in the text be retained, it may mean, because He so willed it all things became existent, and were truly and properly created, in distinction from the idea of emanation and all pantheistic conceptions. Thus, in fine, the angelic host, as represented by their Thrones and Dominions, respond to the glory and honor and thanks which the mundane creation offers to God, because they see in it His worthiness to be thus honored and praised, and because He is also their God and Creator.

Such is the universe, as it was unveiled and presented to the illumined eyes of St. John what time he was 'in the Spirit' (28), and his point of view was in heaven. Here, then, he gives us to see God upon His eternal throne, over-arched by the rainbow of His covenant faithfulness; surrounded by the throned and crowned princes of the heavenly host; in His immediate presence the seven burning lamps of His Holy Spirit; spread out before Him in infinite extent the sea of human life, no longer agitated by the storms of sinful passion, but by His providence having become smooth as glass and transparent as crystal; the forces of nature going forth out of His throne as the intelligent energy of His will; around Him all His works of the mundane creation, blazing with the evidences of His knowledge and wisdom; and all His creatures throughout the universe unceasingly engaged in celebrating His wisdom, power, sovereignty, and holiness, as manifested in their creation. Thus also all creatures were seen by the illumined eyes of the Psalmist, when he called them to unite their voices in praise of their Creator:

> Praise ye the Lord from the heavens;
> Praise Him from the heights.
> Praise ye Him, all His angels;
> Praise ye Him, all His host.

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Praise ye Him, sun and moon;
Praise Him, all ye stars of light.
Praise Him, ye heavens of heavens,
And ye waters that be above the heavens:
Let them praise the name of the Lord.
For He commanded, and they were created;
He hath also established them forever and ever;
He hath made a decree which shall not pass away.
Praise the Lord from the earth,
Ye dragons and all deeps;
Fire and hail, snow and vapor,
Stormy wind fulfilling His word;
Mountains and all hills,
Fruitful trees and all cedars;
Beasts and all cattle,
Creeping things and flying fowl;
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
Princes and all judges of the earth;
Both young men and maidens,
Old men and children:
Let them praise the name of the Lord;
For His name alone is exalted;
His glory is above the earth and the heaven (Ps. cxlviii.).

Thus it is for all human beings with willing minds to unite in this grand chorus of praise. For there are two ways in which God is glorified: one, as He is loved and obeyed by angels and men who believe in Him as their Creator, and give themselves to do His will, to keep all His commandments and ordinances: the other, that of the unbelieving and disobedient, men and angels, who do not worship Him as their Creator; who are proud, trusting in their own wisdom to discern between good and evil, self-willed, and delighting in self-glorification. These also glorify God, though they do not mean it. Unwillingly they are made the instruments of accomplishing His holy purposes, for

Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee,
And the residue of wrath wilt thou restrain (Ps. lxxvi. 10).

God glorifies Himself by punishing all such as they deserve. His eternal justice, which is 'the foundation of His throne' (Ps. xcvii. 2), is glorified in them. And it is for every one of us freely to choose for himself in which of these two ways he will glorify his Maker. Let us choose the better way, that our salvation may be to the praise of His grace.

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XIII

VISION OF CHRIST ENTERING UPON HIS MEDIATORIAL GOVERNMENT V 1–14

In the former scene of this sublime vision, we beheld the created universe worshipping the Creator; and here it is presented to our view engaged in the worship of the Lord Jesus Christ under the symbol of a lamb that has been slain in sacrifice. The grounds of this worship are, that He has redeemed unto God a people out of the world, and thereby has acquired power to open the seven-sealed book of the divine purposes and providence; which book He now takes out of the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne to signify His entrance upon His mediatorial government of the world.

1 And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne a book written within and on the back, and sealed down with seven seals.

This book, or roll, is recognized by all the commentators as the symbol of God's purposes, providence, and government. It is in, or lies upon, His 'right hand,' to signify that His providence is directed, His government exercised, and His purposes executed, by His wisdom and power for the deliverance and salvation of His people (39). It is sevenfold, to denote the unity, fulness, and perfection of its contents (14). It is 'written within and on the back,' i. e. on both sides of its leaves, to denote that it includes ample particulars of the world's history. It is sealed down, or, as we should say, sealed up, with seven seals, to signify that the purposes and providence of God are secret things, which no created mind can penetrate or comprehend until they are revealed. In

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this last particular, it reminds us also of the following: "O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end. . . . The words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end" (Dan. xii. 4–9). For by this allusion we are given to understand that the Apocalypse is, in some sort, a continuation of the prophecies of Daniel (2), and that what he was commanded to leave sealed up is here laid open; as, in general, that which was veiled in the Old Testament is unveiled in the New: for the veil which hung before the Holy of Holies 'was rent in twain from the top to the bottom' when the Lord was crucified (Mat. xxvii. 51).

2 And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a great voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof? 3 And no one in heaven, nor upon earth, nor under the earth, was able to open the book, nor to look upon it.

This is a 'mighty' angel that his voice may be loud enough to be heard throughout the universe. But there is no response to his proclamation, for there is no one in any of the three worlds, in heaven, on earth, nor 'under the earth,' i. e. in Hades (40), who can open the book so as to look upon its pages: which emphasizes the significance of its seven seals, for the providence of God to all creature-wisdom is an insoluble ænigma.

4 And I wept much because no one was found worthy to open the book, nor to look upon it. 5 And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

The Seer has been promised that some, at least, of the secret purposes of God shall be disclosed to him, and now that no one is able to unseal the book in which they are written he is grievously disappointed; but he is soon comforted by one of the elders, who assures him that the Lion of Judah and Root of David has prevailed to loose its seals. The fact, that one of these throned and crowned elders consoles the weeping Seer, is an indication that the holy angels feel a deep sympathy with redeemed souls in their desire to become acquainted with the counsels of God: "Which

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things angels desire to look into ' (1 Pet. i. 12). 'The Lion of the tribe of Judah' is, of course, the Lord Jesus Christ, so called with reference to His genealogical connection with that tribe, and to His all-conquering power, as also to the death-bed prophecy of His great forefather :

> Judah is a lion's whelp ;
> From the prey, my son, thou art gone up :
> He stooped down, he couched as a lion,
> And as a lioness ; who shall rouse him up ? (Gen. xlix. 9.)

In consequence of this prophecy, the lion became the received emblem of the tribe of Judah, and was emblazoned, it is said, upon its military standards. He is called also 'the Root of David,' with reference both to His being the representative of the tribe from which David came and to His lineal descent from the great conquering king of Israel, as in the following prophecies :

> And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse,
> And a branch out of his roots shall bear fruit (Is. xi. 1).
> I will raise unto David a righteous Branch,
> And He shall reign as a king and prosper,
> And shall execute judgment and justice in the land (Jer. xxiii. 5).

The words, 'hath prevailed,' or conquered, denote simply that He has acquired the authority and power to open the book, whereby He solves the ænigma of the divine providence.

6 And I saw in the midst of the throne, and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders a lamb standing as it had been slain in sacrifice, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent forth into all the earth.

The figures of the lion and the root are now dropped, and we see a lamb, a symbol of Christ which occurs 26 times in this book, and runs through all the subsequent visions : nor can it be without significance that here and elsewhere He is symbolized both as a lion and a lamb, creatures as remote and hostile to each other as possible. It may denote that the whole creation, having been brought by sin into conflict with itself, is reconciled and restored to unity in Him, as foreshadowed in many prophecies ·

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The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them (Is. xi. 6).

Here the lamb stands as it had been 'slain in sacrifice,' for that is the precise meaning of the word rendered 'slain' in the English Bible. Thus, and wherever this symbol occurs, we have represented the most fundamental truth of the gospel, in allusion to the Paschal lamb, and all the bloody sacrifices of the ritual law; the truth which is so powerfully symbolized also in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, namely, His atoning death, His most holy sacrifice for the sins of the world: "For our Passover also hath been sacrificed, [even] Christ (1 Cor. v. 7). Ye have been redeemed . . with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Pet. i. 19). Behold the Lamb of God that beareth the sin of the world (John i. 29):

Surely He hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;
Yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was wounded for our transgressions;
He was bruised for our iniquities:
The chastisement of our peace was upon Him;
And with His stripes we are healed.
All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned every one to his own way;
And the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all.
He was oppressed,
Yet He humbled Himself, and opened not His mouth:
As a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
And as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb;
Yea, He opened not His mouth (Is. liii.).

This lamb, moreover, has 'seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God,' which signifies that Christ is possessed of the Holy Spirit, with all fulness of power and wisdom, the eye being the symbol of knowledge and wisdom (115), the horn of power, and seven of fulness or perfection (14): "For He giveth not the Spirit by measure [unto Him] (John iii. 34):

And the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,

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The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (Is. xi. 2).

These seven Spirits are said to be 'sent forth into all the earth,' in allusion to the words of the prophet: "These seven, the eyes of the Lord, they run to and fro in the whole earth" (Zech. iv. 10); and to the outpouring of the Spirit upon 'all flesh' on the day of Pentecost (Acts ii. 17), as elsewhere also it is declared that 'the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal' (1 Cor. xii. 7): for it is by this universal presence and influence of His Spirit that the Lord accomplishes all His purposes of grace and salvation. The Lamb is seen in the midst of the throne and of the living creatures and of the elders to signify that He is one with God and the centre of the universe.

7 And He came and took it out of the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne.

He takes the book out of the hand of God that He may open its seals and make known its contents; also, to signify His entrance upon the mediatorial government of the world, that He may carry into execution the divine purposes concerning grace, redemption, and judgment. This transaction in the spiritual world is represented in a multitude of Scriptures, such as the following: "One like unto the Son of Man . . . came even to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him; and there was given unto Him dominion and glory and a kingdom (Dan. vii. 13–14). The Father judgeth no man, but all judgment He hath committed unto the Son (John v. 22). He hath put all things under His feet (1 Cor. xv. 27):

Yet have I set my King
Upon my holy hill of Zion. . .
Ask of me, and I will give thee
The nations for thine inheritance,
And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession (Ps. ii. 6–8).

It is thus that the Father commits to the Son, and the Son takes upon Himself, the mediatorial government of the world, and becomes the administrative head of the whole scheme of

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divine providence. Hence it is that He alone is able to loose the seals of this seven-sealed book. We shall find this interpretation of the symbol abundantly confirmed and illustrated in the sequel.

8 And when He took the book, the four living creatures and the four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having each a harp, and golden chalices full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

These life-forms fall down before the Lamb to denote that the whole mundane creation (113) takes part in His worship at His entrance upon His mediatorial government, as being incidentally a partaker of its benefits: "For . . the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom. viii. 19–21). The 24 elders also fall from their thrones before Him to signify that the holy angels, as represented by their princes (111), join in His worship, He having now become their Lord, as it is written: "When He bringeth His first begotten into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him" (Heb. i. 6). But here we have mysteries alluded to which we very imperfectly comprehend; for these angelic princes, besides harps, the instrument and symbol of festive praise, have golden bowls or chalices (not 'vials,' as in the English Bible) full of incense, 'which are the prayers of the saints,' i. e. they represent these prayers as rendered acceptable and efficacious by the mediation of Christ. Where did the elders get them? and what do they do with them? Do they offer them to the Lamb as the most acceptable of all offerings? Is this a part of the ministry of angels, of whom it is written: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth unto service for those who shall be the heirs of salvation?" (Heb. i. 14). Upon these questions, as also upon the meaning of this incense, we shall have further light hereafter (Rev. viii. 3–5). Meanwhile, this much is plain, that the prayers of the saints are so precious to the Lord that they can be fitly represented by golden chalices full of the costliest incense offered unto Him with the music of celestial harps

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by the throned and crowned princes of the unfallen spiritual world.

9 And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain in sacrifice, and hast redeemed unto God with thy blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation; 10 and hast made them a kingdom and priests unto our God, and they reign over the earth.

The living creatures and the elders sing this song of praise to the Lamb, and it is 'a new song' in that it celebrates the opening of the new dispensation by His entrance upon His mediatorial reign in reward of His atoning sacrifice: "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross: wherefore also God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 8–11). By an error in the very imperfect Greek text from which the common English translation was made, the elders and living creatures are made to say, 'hast redeemed us'; which represents the angels and nature as having been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; whereas this redemption properly applies only to men or individuals 'out of' all nations, this universality being symbolized by the four particulars enumerated (114). Those who are thus redeemed are made a kingdom and priests (16) unto Him who is the God of angels and men and nature alike; 'and they reign over the earth,' in the prophetic present tense, to express the most perfect certainty and vivid realization of what shall be hereafter.

11 And I saw, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, and of the living creatures, and of the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands; 12 saying, with a great voice, Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain in sacrifice to take the power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.

The word 'take' here reminds us that the Lamb has just taken the book out of the hand of Him who sits upon the

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throne, and therewith the glory of opening its seals, and of carrying its decrees into execution. Thus also we are given to see and hear the 'innumerable company of angels' (Heb. xii. 22) who stand in an outer circle around their Thrones and Dominions, as they respond to the song they have just heard with a sevenfold (14) ascription of praise to the Lamb, because they are all partakers of beneficial consequences from His redemptive work, and it sets Him over them as their Lord (123).

13 And every creature that is in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and the things that are in them, all heard I saying, Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, be the blessing and the honor and the glory and the might forever and ever. 14 And the four living creatures said, Amen: and the elders fell down and worshipped.

In these words, as I understand them, the Seer interprets the preceding symbols. For that they are, in part at least, such an interpretation, and not a subsequent scene in the vision, is evident from the fact, that 'every creature in heaven' certainly includes the angel host previously mentioned; and 'every creature on earth and on the sea' is a particularization of what is represented by the four living creatures (113). Hence we may understand their 'Amen,' not as a response, but as the closing word of their song, just as the Lord's Prayer closes; and so of the elders falling down and worshipping, as a repetition for emphasis of what has just been said, that they 'fell down before the Lamb.' Thus, as in the preceding vision (115) the angel host and the mundane creation praise God as their Creator, so here they ascribe all honor and glory to Him and to the Lamb, offering the same worship to both, on account of the Lord's redeeming sacrifice, and of His power thus acquired to reign over the universe.

Such are some of the great truths which are here pictured to our view in imagery so vivid and expressive that its general import cannot be misunderstood, however obscure it may be in some of its minor details: and these are just

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those truths which must always have the deepest interest and strongest consolation for the people of God. For here we behold our Jesus, for the merit and efficacy of His sacrificial death, installed as the mediatorial ruler of the created universe, as the administrative head of the whole scheme of divine providence, as the object of worship to all creatures, from the most exalted of the unfallen angels to the lowest dweller upon earth, and even to those who are 'under the earth,' i. e. in Hades; all of whom are partakers of consequences from His redemptive work, and hence deeply interested in the great spiritual transaction in which He enters upon His office and government: "We behold Him who was made a little lower than the angels, Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor. Thou didst set Him over the works of thy hands; thou didst put all things under His feet (Heb. ii. 6–9). For He must reign till He hath put all things under His feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (1 Cor. xv. 25–26). The meaning of it all is the ultimate and assured triumph of good over evil in this world. Let us rejoice and be glad in this assurance, so that 'the joy of the Lord may be our strength' (Neh. viii. 10) to live in expectation of this glorious triumph, and that we may take part in this new song: "Worthy is the Lamb that hath been slain in sacrifice to take the power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. . . . Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb be the blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever."

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XIV

THE FIRST FOUR SEALS . THE FOUR SORE JUDGMENTS OF GOD VI 1–8

The revelations which we are now to consider go forth from the opening of the seven-sealed book. The first four of them constitute a class by themselves, differing from the three following in essential particulars, as is evident from the significant ministry in them of the four living creatures, which do not appear at all in the others. The most important of these differences seems to be, that the judgments of the first four seals take place strictly within the realm of nature, by means of the uniform operation of natural forces and human agency according to natural laws; whereas, in the last three, they are mingled with abnormal or miraculous interpositions of divine power. All of them, however, represent the inflictions which the Lord finds it necessary to send upon the rebellious world in subduing it unto Himself.

1 And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals: and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come: 2 and I saw, and, behold, a white horse, and he that sat upon him had a bow, and there was given unto him a crown, and he came forth conquering and to conquer.

This is the only one of these four seals which does not interpret itself; and the number of conflicting interpretations to which it has given rise is almost incredible, ranging from that which regards this mounted and crowned bowman as the Lord Jesus Christ to that which identifies Him with the devil! Lange, who adopts the former view, along with most other commentators, says, "The riders upon the other three horses ride behind Him as squires behind their knight"! The American Editor of Lange's Commentary interprets

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the symbol as representing science and culture in their hostility to Christianity. But all this grotesque diversity has arisen from failing to notice that the Seer himself has given us, at the close of the series, a perfectly clear and explicit interpretation of this seal, as we shall see when we come to it. Meanwhile, we can attend to the significant fact that, at the opening of each of these four seals, one of the living creatures, 'as with a voice of thunder' in the first case, and, no doubt, in all the others, utters the word, 'Come.' In some texts we have 'Come and see,' but this addition is not found in the oldest and best manuscripts, but only the thundering imperative, Come, in the sense of come forth. To whom, then, is this word addressed? upon which also there is a great diversity of opinion. Dean Alford, from whose scholarly Commentary I have derived much assistance, but from whom I am compelled to differ in some of his fundamental ideas, understands this word as a prayer that the Lord would hasten His coming, though how with due reverence, or with what symbolic propriety, it could be addressed to Him 'in a voice of thunder,' he does not undertake to explain. This diversity of interpretation also has arisen from a similar failure to notice that the Seer has informed us to whom these living creatures speak. For in the third seal, a voice is heard 'from the midst of the four living creatures' (Rev. vi. 6), as if from all of them at once, commanding the rider on the black horse, the symbolic minister of famine, to cause it to rage with the utmost intensity. Moreover, the command, 'Come forth,' is immediately followed, in each case, by the words, 'and there came forth' one of these riders upon horses. We must remember also that these life-forms are seen 'in the midst of the throne,' as representing the wisdom and power of God in nature (113), which explains the authority with which they deliver their commands. From such considerations, it is quite certain that this thunder-word, Come, is addressed to these symbolical ministers of God's judgments, commanding them to come forth and do their executions upon the rebellious world. They are all

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riders upon horses, to signify the rapidity and unavoidable impetus of the destructive forces of nature which they symbolize, in such forms as war, pestilence, and famine. What particular judgment is represented by this mounted and crowned bowman will appear when we come to the Seer's interpretation of the symbol; but here it is plain enough that he cannot represent the Lord, for how could these creatures have authority to give Him commands in a voice of thunder?

3 And when He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, Come: 4 and there came forth another horse that was red; and unto him that sat upon him it was given to take peace from the earth, and that they should slay one another; and there was given unto him a great sword.

There is no difference of opinion as to the meaning of this symbol. In the blood-red color of the horse, in the great sword with which the rider is armed, in his power to take peace from the earth, and cause that men shall slay each other; in each and all of these particulars we have symbolically represented war, offensive and defensive, civil and international, reciprocal slaughter, as on the thousand battle-fields of human history. The Seer does not inform us which one of the living creatures speaks in each case, but probably it is 'the one having the face of a man' that calls for war, since it depends upon man's agency (113). Here, then, we are instructed that war, howsoever the result of human folly and wickedness, is one of the sore judgments of God; and certainly it is one that can never come to an end until men shall cease from their rebellion against 'the Prince of peace' (Is. ix. 6), and shall submit themselves to the authority of 'Shiloh,' the giver of peace (Gen. xlix. 10).

But the severity of this judgment, the ravages of this scourge, who can comprehend? What boundless destruction of life in prehistoric times, and since, by the conflicts of savage tribes! How enormous it must have been in the Egyptian, Babylonian, Ninevite, Persian, and Macedonian conquests! What slaughter in the wars of the Roman re-

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public and empire! It is estimated that not less than six millions of human beings must have perished in the wars of Ghengis Khan, a single Asiatic conqueror! Who can estimate the numbers that were slain in the subjugation of Europe by the northern barbarians! What untold millions must have perished in the Tartar invasion of China; in the Mohammedan, Marhatta, and British conquests of India; in the wars of the Crusades and of the Reformation; in the conquest of America by Spain; in the ravages by Napoleon; in the late German invasion of France; in our own civil conflict; and in those which have raged from immemorial ages to the present time on the continent of Africa in connection with the slave-trade! Is it not well said, that the sword of him who here goes forth to take peace from the earth is 'a great sword'? And still the most advanced and so-called Christian nations are armed to the teeth against each other. The vastness of their armaments far exceeds all that was ever before known; and these will as surely come into use in future wars as the thunder cloud is sure to shoot forth its stored up lightning:

> For nation will rise against nation,
> And kingdom against kingdom (Mat. xxiv. 7).
> And they will fight every one against his brother,
> And every one against his neighbor;
> City against city,
> And kingdom against kingdom (Is. xix. 2).

The only thing that can ever put a stop to this reciprocal slaughter is the nations coming to submit themselves unto 'the King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev. xix. 16), and govern themselves by His peace-giving authority and laws; which in time they must do, for

> He will judge between the nations,
> And will reprove many peoples;
> And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,
> And their spears into pruning-hooks;
> Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> Neither shall they learn war any more (Is. ii. 4).

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5 And when He opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, Come: and I saw, and, behold, a black horse, and he that sat upon him had a balance in his hand: 6 and I heard, as it were a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, A chœnix of wheat for a denarius, and three chœnixes of barley for a denarius; and the oil and the wine hurt thou not.

No less clearly does this symbol interpret itself, for the minister of this judgment rides upon a black horse, and black is the color of famine:

> Their visage is blacker than a coal . .
> That be slain with hunger (Lam. iv. 8-9).
> Our skin is black like an oven,
> Because of the burning heat of famine (v. 10).

The balance in his hand signifies that the food of the people is now to be weighed out to them by reason of its extreme scarcity, as in many prophecies: "I will break the staff of bread . . and they shall eat it by weight (Ez. iv. 16). They shall deliver your bread again by weight, and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied" (Lev. xxvi. 26). Probably the living creature that issues this command is the one like a bullock, representing the useful animals, upon which human sustenance so largely depends (113). But the 'voice in the midst of the four living creatures' seems to proceed from them all; and it commands the minister of famine to make it rage with the utmost intensity: for the chœnix was a measure containing less than a quart, and the denarius was a silver coin more in weight than one of 15 cents in our money, when this weight of silver was worth about as much as a dollar is now, since it was the usual price of a bushel of wheat. Hence this famine was such as would fall upon us, if the money which now purchases a bushel of wheat should suffice for no more than a quart; the consequence of which would be that multitudes must perish by starvation. The command not to hurt the oil nor the wine has been variously understood. Some strangely enough take it as a limitation of the famine, as if luxuries were to be plentiful, while necessaries are at starvation prices. But wine and oil were sacred emblems, the one of the blood of

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Christ, as in the Eucharist, the other of the influences of the Holy Spirit. Hence this prohibition is best understood as enjoining that nothing shall be done in detriment of the spiritual welfare of mankind; for all the judgments of God have a benevolent object, as being necessary to subdue the world unto Himself.

The severity of this scourge has hardly been less, perhaps even greater, than that of war. In former times, before Christian civilization had provided our present facilities for the increase and transportation of food, it was infinitely more destructive than it is now. But in our time, we have had two sore famines in Ireland, by the former of which not less than a million of human beings perished; later still, another in China, by which it has been estimated that the population of a single province has been diminished ten millions; and within the last few years, Persia and Southern India have been ravaged; an immediate consequence of which, in the last case, has been the conversion to Christianity of many thousands of the heathen. Famine, therefore, is another of the Lord's sore judgments to subdue the rebellious world; which also can never cease until His kingdom shall be everywhere established, when the prophecy shall be fulfilled:

> The ploughman shall overtake the reaper,
> And the treader of grapes him that soweth seed;
> And the mountains shall drop sweet wine,
> And the hills shall melt (Amos. ix. 13).
> Your threshing shall reach unto the vintage,
> And the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time;
> And ye shall eat your bread to the full,
> And dwell in your land safely (Lev. xxvi. 5).

7 And when He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, Come: 8 and I saw, and, behold, a pale horse; and he that sat upon him, his name was Death, and Hades followed with him.

For the most part, this symbol also interprets itself, for Death here is to be understood with special reference to pestilence, to which this name is given by a figure of speech the same that we use when we call it the plague, as if it were the most terrible of all plagues; and, indeed, a peculiar form of pestilence in former times was called the black death.

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The name is significant of the vast multitudes whom pestilence destroys, and whose bodies were formerly devoured by the birds of prey. Hence it is probable that the living creature which calls forth this plague is the one like an eagle (113), in allusion, perhaps, to the words of the Lord: "Wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Mat. xxiv. 28). Hades is here and elsewhere (39) personified as the baleful power which drags the dead down to its dark domain, as in the following passages: "God will redeem my soul from the power of Hades (Ps. xlix. 15). A proud man . . who enlargeth his desire as Hades, and he is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all peoples" (Hab. ii. 5). With this following, Death here rides upon a 'pale' horse, the color of corpses and the symbol of terror, such as prevails amidst the ravages of pestilence, when the most awful panics occur, one of which I witnessed in the cholera of 1849.

As indicated by the gloom of these symbols, and as exemplified in history, it is probable that this judgment has not been less destructive than either war or famine. The Roman historians inform us that 'a furious plague, in the third century, raged for 15 years without interruption in every province and city, and almost in every family in the empire, during which 5,000 persons died daily at Rome, and many towns that had escaped the ravages of the barbarians were entirely depopulated.' What innumerable multitudes have perished by the small-pox, yellow fever, Asiatic cholera, and other species of pestilence! And, worst of all, the black death has raged from time to time since the commencement of human history over almost the whole world. In Europe alone during the fourteenth century it is estimated to have carried off 80,000,000 of people.

8 And authority was given unto them over a fourth part of the earth to kill with the sword and with famine and with Death and with the wild beasts of the earth.

It is in these words that we find our Seer's interpretation of the first seal. It is true, they are referred by all the com-

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mentators to Death and Hades, notwithstanding it is absolutely demonstrable by two reasons that they cannot rationally be so understood: for (1) this interpretation requires that Hades should be taken in the sense of a power to destroy life, a meaning which it has nowhere else, for which no example or authority has ever been produced: (2) by no law of exegesis can either pestilence or Hades be made to include the killing of men by the sword, or by famine, or by wild beasts. Hence to understand the words, 'authority was given unto them' thus to destroy life, is nothing less than absurd. If it were not for numerous similar and inexplicable instances, it would be very surprising that no one seems ever to have thought of reading this closing statement as a paragraph by itself, and consequently as referring, not exclusively to the last, but to all of these four seals: for thus it would have been seen at a glance that special pains are here taken to explain the first of them, the only one that has hitherto been left in any obscurity; and so the commentators would have been spared their wild guessing, that the mounted and crowned bowman must represent either the Lord or the devil! Here, then, after the first four seals have been opened, and in view of the entirely different character of those that are to follow, in which the living creatures will have no ministry, the Apocalyptist comes to a place where he may fitly pause, and add whatever may be necessary to a clear and certain understanding of the symbols he has just described. Accordingly he adds the following words, "And authority was given unto them," i. e. to these four ministers of the divine judgments, "to kill (1) with the sword," which self-evidently refers to that one of them who is armed with a great sword, and whose mission is to take peace from the earth, that men should slay one another: (2) "with famine," which no less plainly refers to him who makes food so scarce that great multitudes perish by starvation: (3) "with Death," i. e. pestilence, Hades following (133) to lay hold upon the dead; (4) "and with the wild beasts of the earth," which consequently must refer to the only remaining one of these four ministers, i. e. to him of the first seal. Here, then,

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according to the Seer's own interpretation, this rider upon a white horse, with a crown and bow, and called forth by the lion-like living creature, is the symbol of the plague of wild beasts. Evidently it is not self-interpreting, as are the others, and for this reason, the others being used as means, it is authoritatively interpreted for us by the Seer himself, as in other cases of obscure symbols (112); yet, when thus understood in its general import, its particulars become very significant and expressive. For the minister of this scourge rides upon a white horse, which is always the symbol of triumphant progress, as in the Roman pomps; a crown is given him, and he comes forth conquering and to conquer, literally, 'that he may conquer,' to signify that this plague shall extensively prevail; and he is armed with a bow, the most effective weapon then in use for hunting, to suggest the general significance of the symbol, perhaps, also, to denote that, instead of men hunting beasts, beasts should hunt men.

In further confirmation of this interpretation, it should be observed that these four seals are universally recognized as constituting a class by themselves (127): but all the members of a class must be of the same sort, so that they can be obtained by one principle of analysis; and this principle in three of these, war, pestilence, and famine, is that of a judgment or scourge; consequently, in the remaining one, that of the first seal, it must be a judgment or scourge; otherwise the laws of thought are violated in the classification. It is of more importance, however, to observe that, in the prophets, war, pestilence, famine, and wild beasts are frequently called 'the four sore judgments of God,' as in the following passages: "I send my four sore judgments upon Jerusalem, the sword and the famine and the noisome beasts and the pestilence (Ez. xiv. 21). I will send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee; and pestilence and blood shall pass through thee; and I will bring the sword upon thee" (v. 17). A similar mention of them occurs in other places (xiv. 13–20). And with respect to the plague of wild beasts particularly, there are a great many

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passages where it is spoken of as one of the sore judgments of God, of which the following is a single example: "I will send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children . . and make you few in number, and your ways shall become desolate" (Lev. xxvi. 22). For this scourge is often connected, both as cause and effect, with depopulation. It causes great destruction of life where population has been previously thinned by war, pestilence, or famine. The Roman historians inform us that, in some provinces of the empire which had been ravaged by the northern barbarians, there was an enormous multiplication of beasts of prey during the third and fourth centuries. One of them casually mentions that as many as 500 wolves at one time fell upon the few surviving inhabitants of a ruined city. In savage and semi-civilized countries, where the climate will permit it, this scourge is always ravining. The whole continent of Africa has always been afflicted with lions, leopards, panthers, crocodiles, and other ferocious beasts, and with almost innumerable serpents, some of enormous size, and many of them poisonous. In India, at the present time, some 20,000 persons annually lose their lives from this cause. Such are the actual facts in nature, and such they have ever been, except where Christian civilization has mitigated or put an end to this plague. We need not hesitate, therefore, to take this striking symbol of the first seal as a representation of the destructive forces of nature embodied in, and executing the judgments of God by means of, 'the wild beasts of the earth.'

Thus we see that these four seals represent the four sore judgments of God, which He finds it necessary to send upon mankind in order to subdue their rebellion against Himself: and this precisely is the significance of their disclosure by the opening of these seals; for, as mere sufferings, they are in no wise under seal, or hidden; they are universally known and felt; but, as His judgments, they are not known, but are referred to their natural causes, and the natural mind looks no further. Here, therefore, by the loosing of their seals, the hand and purpose of God in them is disclosed, and

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we learn that through them the Lord Christ is judging the world for its rebellion against His authority. And as it is said here, that 'authority was given unto them over a fourth part of the earth' (which is another indication that the words refer to these four ministers of judgment), so there can be little doubt but that by these plagues a fourth part of mankind constantly perishes. However gloomy, therefore, these symbolical pictures, they certainly are not overcharged, since they simply represent the actual facts of nature and history, and only some of the evils which men suffer for want of the benign influences of the gospel and Christian civilization. For these plagues are all mitigated, and they tend to disappear, as the Lord's blessed kingdom makes progress and becomes established in the world. That of wild beasts has already passed away from all countries where Christianity has developed a high and powerful civilization, which is one of its invariable consequences. Famine and pestilence are greatly mitigated, and must ultimately cease wherever its sanitary precautions, and its ever increasing appliances for the abundant production and rapid transportation of food, shall come to prevail. And as for war, in so far as it still continues to rage, manifestly this is because the Christian religion has gained as yet no foothold in many countries, and is so imperfectly realized in others. For when the Lord's kingdom shall be everywhere established, and its moral laws shall come to be more perfectly understood and obeyed, self-evidently it can be nothing else but a kingdom of peace. When the nations shall be gathered under the sceptre of Shiloh (129), then the ancient prophecies must be fulfilled, that war shall be no more, and "they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it" (Micah iv. 4).

The practical lessons of these four seal-openings are many and of great importance, some of which are the following: (1) The sufferings of mankind, howsoever depending upon natural causes operating according to uniform laws, are the penal consequences of sin, and indispensable to its correction,

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and to the establishment of the Lord's blessed kingdom: (2) The plagues of war, pestilence, famine, and wild beasts must continue their ravages, until the nations and mankind in general shall come to acknowledge and submit to the authority of the Lord Christ and keep His laws: (3) The best thing we can do to mitigate these plagues, and cause them ultimately to cease, is to pray and labor with all our powers for the progress of the gospel in the world at large and in individual souls, until 'Thy kingdom come' shall receive its crowning answer and fulfilment. May the Lord hasten it in its time!

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XV

THE FIFTH SEAL THE SOULS OF THE MARTYRS UNDER THE ALTAR VI 9–11

The first four seals establish the point, that the judgments and events of these visions do not always follow in the order of time in which they are successively represented; for pestilence and famine, though commonly they are preceded by war, sometimes occur in times of peace, and the plague of wild beasts, which is the first of the series, is often subsequent to all the others. In fact, any one of these calamities may precede or follow any other, and all of them may be experienced at the same time. In like manner, we are not to understand that what is represented under this fifth seal is either prior or subsequent to what has gone before. Indeed, the symbol, although it is wonderfully picturesque, does not picture historical events, but what belongs exclusively to the invisible spiritual world. Hence the question of historical precedence and sequence, where it is a matter of any importance, must be determined by other evidence than the order of the visions; and this is one of the leading principles of interpretation for the symbols of this book. Hence, also, we have here no ministry of the living creatures which, at the opening of the preceding seals, uttered their thunder-word of command to the destructive forces of nature to come forth and execute the divine judgments (128); for what this symbol represents does not take place within the realm of nature, and there are no judgments executed, but a reason is given for their delay.

9 And when He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that had been slain in sacrifice for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

The word here rendered 'slain in sacrifice' is the same that is constantly applied to the sacrificial death of the

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Lamb (121); and thus the martyrs are identified with Him in His most holy sacrifice, not, indeed, in its atoning efficacy, but as witnesses to make it known, just as He is identified with them in that He is 'the faithful martyr' (15). This idea is still further developed and emphasized by the statement that they suffered 'for the word of God and for the testimony which they held,' as He did, and by their souls being seen 'under the altar'; for this altar must be understood as that upon which the bloody sacrifices were offered, whose blood, in which was the soul or life of the victim, was poured out at its foot, and hence these souls of the martyrs are here represented as under it. We are not to understand that they were personally there, any more than that the pestilence actually rides upon a pale horse, for this whole altar-scene is a pictorial symbol, and must be symbolically interpreted. But as to their identification with the Lord in the sacrificial character of their death, we have many other declarations to the same effect, as in the words of St. Paul: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up those things which are behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for His body's sake which is the church (Col. i. 24). I am now being poured out (2 Tim. iv. 6). And if I also am poured out upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all" (Phil. ii. 17).

10 And they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell upon the earth?

They address the Lord as their 'Master,' because, as His servants, they have a right to His protection, and to the vindication of the cause for which they have suffered, and they appeal to His holiness and truth, as requiring that He should avenge their blood upon the earth-dwellers; for their martyrdom, as identified with that of the Lord, is the sin of the world. But here we naturally ask, How does this prayer agree with that of St. Stephen for his murderers, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge'? (Acts vii. 60) or with that of Jesus upon the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they

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know not what they do'? (Luke xxiii. 46). Does it not express an unchristian sentiment? For the solution of this difficulty, we must bear in mind the intensely symbolical character of the whole representation, and may recall what is said of the first martyr, Abel: "The Lord said unto Cain, . . . The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground" (Gen. iv. 9–10). For no one finds any difficulty in that highly figurative and poetical, yet most significant expression; and this symbolical cry of the martyrs expresses the same truth, namely, that their blood does unceasingly cry 'with a great voice' for the divine justice to be executed upon the world as guilty of it. But this is only a partial solution of the difficulty, for we shall see hereafter that the Lord's judgments do literally come upon the world in answer to 'the prayers of all the saints' (Rev. viii. 3–5) that His kingdom may be established, unto which these judgments are a necessary means: and this is one of the great truths disclosed in these unveilings of the spiritual world.

11 And there was given unto them, to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little while, until their fellow servants and their brethren who should be killed, as they were, should be fulfilled.

This symbol of the white robe frequently occurs, and, in the case of redeemed souls, always with the same meaning, namely, that they have obtained the victory over their spiritual enemies (37) and have been purified from the defilements of sin through the sacrifice of Christ (85). Here it must be taken with all that it signifies and that goes with it, in order to comprehend the state in which these martyr souls actually are, while they wait for their final vindication. For doubtless it is the 'fine linen pure and bright' (Rev. xix. 8), in which the Bride is brought home to the mansions of her celestial Bridegroom, and the 'wedding garment' (Mat. xxii. 11–12), which secures a cordial welcome to the marriage supper of the King's Son: moreover, those who are thus arrayed walk with their Lord, having palms in their hands,

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and join in the triumphal songs of the heavenly host (Rev. vii. 9–14). Thus we see how much is implied, either as present or prospective, by this gift of the white robe to the martyr souls; and all this, in perfect consistency with their symbolical cry for the justice of God upon their murderers. Their blessedness is still further declared by its being said unto them, 'that they should rest yet for a little while,' for this is not to be taken as a limitation of their rest, but only of their waiting, and the rest itself is to be interpreted by what is said of it in a subsequent vision: "I heard a voice from heaven, saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; for their works do follow them" (Rev. xiv. 13). In fine, the reason given why these judgments must be delayed for a little while is, that the number of the martyrs is not yet filled up; others still, their fellow servants, in allusion to the Lord as their 'Master,' and their brethren, must suffer, as they have done (10), 'for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus' (25). Not enough martyr blood has yet been shed to make their witnessing all-powerful; not enough of this precious 'seed of the church' has been sown to bring forth the whole fruit of the covenanted salvation. But this delay is not to be understood as if they had hitherto gone altogether unavenged, but in the sense that their full vindication could not take place until their number should be completed; for as martyr blood has never ceased to flow, so has there never been a time when it was not at least partially avenged. Moreover, the cup of the world's iniquities is not yet full; it must be filled up to the brim by more martyrdoms; and then the final judgments shall be no longer delayed: the time also shall be short; yet 'a little while,' in God's measurement, and the glorious cause of the martyrs shall be triumphantly vindicated.

Such is the plain meaning of the symbols of this fifth seal; and surely in no other way could the great and solemn truth which it discloses be so vividly and impressively represented. But what precisely is this truth, which was kept under seal, as one of the secrets of God, until it was revealed in this seal-

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opening? Evidently this, that the great judgments which come, and are yet to come, upon mankind, the 'earth dwellers,' are in punishment for their treatment of the martyrs, the Lord and His servants, and in vindication of the cause for which they suffered. For this is something which can be known only by such a disclosure of God's secret counsels, of which the world at large is still ignorant, and which is by no means appreciated as it should be by the church herself. For the blood-guiltiness of the world in the murder of the Lord Jesus, of His prophets and apostles, and of 'the noble army of martyrs,' is such that it can never be measured, nor ever be made known in its enormity, otherwise than by the judgments which it brings upon mankind, as these are portrayed in the subsequent visions of this book. The crucifixion of the Lord of glory by the hands of those whom He came to save; 'all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, who was slain between the sanctuary and the altar' (Mat. xxiii. 35); the long and bloody persecutions of the primitive Christians, in which such multitudes of them miserably perished; the horrid cruelties inflicted upon them, when they were thrown to the wild beasts in the amphitheatres, were smeared with pitch and burned alive to light the public gardens, while the people delighted themselves with the spectacle; all that has come to light from the catacombs of Rome, where they found a subterranean refuge, where their children were born, lived, and died, without ever seeing the light of the sun; all that took place in the Waldensian and Huguenot persecutions, and in the dungeons of the Spanish inquisition: the guilt of all this is such that it can never be comprehended by any but God; and the demand which it makes upon His justice is such that it could not be fitly represented by any less powerful symbol than that of the souls of the martyrs under the altar of burnt sacrifices, crying with a great voice, 'How long, O Master, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell upon the earth?'

Finally, we see here that the judgment of God upon rebel-

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lious souls is delayed only that His people may be all gathered in, their number completed, and until the cup of the world's iniquities shall be filled up. Then shall the end come. Divine justice will be executed upon all those who, by rejection of their Saviour, have consented unto His death and to the martyrdom of His servants. Then will be fulfilled that which He has prophesied concerning them, and of which there is always a dim foreboding in their consciences: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the everlasting fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels" (Mat. xxiv. 41). He will do them no wrong. Not one drop of punishment will He give them to drink which they have not justly deserved. He will duly consider all the aggravations of their guilt, and all its palliations as well, and will treat them with even-handed justice; and He only can judge what His justice requires. But who for himself can stand under the justice of God? Do we not all need that mercy which is so freely offered us? Oh, let us not reject it, for 'yet a little while,' and

> He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck
> Shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (Prov. xxix. 1).

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XVI

THE SIXTH SEAL HARBINGERS OF THE LAST JUDGMENT VI 12–17

When the fifth seal was opened, we saw the souls of the martyrs under the altar of bloody sacrifices, and heard their cry for the justice of God to avenge their blood upon the guilty world; but for this they were to wait 'a little while,' until their number should be filled up. Now, therefore, at the opening of the sixth seal, this interval of time has elapsed, their number is complete, and we behold their vindication as about to take place, the final consummation as imminent. The symbolic picture here presented to our view is not that of the last judgment itself, which will not take place until the close of the visions that go forth in prolonged succession from the opening of the seventh seal, although this does not imply any extension of time, but the harbingers of the end are here represented by portentous phenomena, as foretold by the prophets:

> I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth,
> Blood and fire and pillars of smoke:
> The sun shall be turned into darkness,
> And the moon into blood,
> Before the great and terrible day of the Lord come (Joel ii. 30–31).

Here also we have a vivid portrayal of the terror and anguish which these harbingers will awaken in all classes of mankind. From the physical phenomena described we might anticipate that the living creatures, the symbol of the divine powers in nature (113), would reappear with their ministry, but they are kept out of view apparently for the reason, that the things here represented are not, strictly speaking, natural phenomena, i. e. they are not produced by the uniform operation

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of natural forces, but are altogether abnormal, or miraculous, wherein they differ fundamentally from those of the first four seals (127). It must be acknowledged, however, that this reason is not perfectly satisfactory, for where the disclosures of this seal are more particularly described, as in the vision of the seven last plagues, one of these symbolical creatures does reappear, although his ministry there is kept in the background (Rev. xv. 7).

12 And I saw when He opened the sixth seal: and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood; 13 and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, being shaken by a great wind; 14 and the heaven parted asunder, as a scroll being rolled up; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

The first of these phenomena is a great σεισμός, which, though the word is commonly applied to earthquakes, signifies literally a shaking or trembling. The Seer beholds in vision a universal trembling of the earth and the heavens, as if they were seized with appalling terrors. It is of frequent occurrence in the symbolical sense of convulsion and subversion of all earthly and worldly relations among men, in order that those of the Lord's kingdom may be established; which is, no doubt, its meaning here, as also in the following passages: "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all nations (Hag. ii. 6–7). Whose voice then shook the earth; but now He hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make tremble, not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this 'yet once more' signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain" (Heb. xii. 26–27). The images that follow are also of frequent occurrence: "There shall be signs in the sun and moon and stars; and upon the earth distress of nations in perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear and apprehension of those things which are coming upon the earth; for the powers of the heavens shall be shaken (Luke xxi. 25–26).

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I clothe the heavens with blackness,
And make sackcloth their covering (Is. l. 3).
All the host of heaven shall be dissolved,
And the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll;
And all their host shall fade away,
As the leaf fadeth from the vine,
And as a fading [leaf] from the fig tree (xxxiv. 4).
The sun shall be darkened,
And the moon shall not give her light (Mat. xxiv. 29).
The moon shall be turned into blood (Joel ii. 31).
And the stars shall fall from heaven. . .
The heavens shall pass away with a great noise,
And the elements shall melt with fervent heat" (2 Pet. iii. 10).

As to the meaning of these symbols, the heavenly bodies are used in Scripture for various symbolical purposes, with a wide range of significance, but most frequently to denote the common and mediate sources and supplies of intellectual and spiritual light, as the pastors of the churches are represented by stars (41), and in the following instances: "The moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for the Lord will reign in mount Zion (Is. xxiv. 23). The city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb was the lamp thereof" (Rev. xxi. 23). Hence the darkening of the sun, and the moon becoming as blood, and the falling of the stars, should signify the failure of the greatest of merely human luminaries, the luridness of the light which they may still give, and that the lesser lights no longer shine as from heaven, but have become altogether earthly and delusive, as when science becomes materialistic and sceptical. The parting asunder of the heaven, and its being rolled up as a scroll of parchment, may denote the passing away of all former conceptions and habits of thought, in order to give place to those of the new order of things represented by the new heavens (Rev. xxi. 1): and the removal of the mountains and islands out of their places by the shock of the great earthquake, emphasizes the subversion of all things that are most fixed and stable in human relations (146), that what is symbolized by the new earth may take their places. But these symbols will recur in subsequent visions, where their meaning will become clearer.

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Here, now, a question arises, whether these appalling physical phenomena are to be understood as merely symbolical, or as real cosmical disturbances and convulsions in nature. I shall not undertake absolutely to decide this question, upon which there is certainly room for difference of opinion. For, on one side, we have the highly figurative and symbolical language of Scripture in general, especially of our Lord's words, and of this book; besides which, much similar imagery has, as we have seen (18), at least a subordinate reference to the first advent and to the destruction of Jerusalem: moreover, the literal parting asunder and rolling up of the sky, which is nothing but a void expanse, and the literal falling of the stars, do not seem to be possible or conceivable. But, on the other side, we have abundant evidence that there is a close connection between the moral and physical worlds, so that they correspond, in some sort, and are partakers of each other's good and evil. For when man was created in innocence, there was a Paradise for his abode; when he sinned and fell, there were thorns and thistles to torment him. When his descendants were morally ripe for judgment, there was a deluge prepared and waiting to execute it; and so of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by a rain of fire and brimstone. When a promise was to be given that the earth should no more be destroyed by a flood, there was a rainbow to serve as its token and seal. And, passing over a multitude of similar correspondences, when the Lord was crucified, the heavens and the earth were convulsed with signs and wonders, portents and prodigies.

Nor should we lay too much stress on the apparent impossibility of the phenomena of this vision, for it is quite conceivable that they should be made to appear as here described. The stars falling from heaven, e. g. which would seem to be a mere symbol, may be something more: for all those meteors called shooting stars are now known to be of the same substance and nature as the other heavenly bodies; and they are immensely numerous, so that the great Kepler could say 'there were more of them than of fish in the sea.' Their brilliancy, also, which is caused by their fric-

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tion as they move with planetary velocity through the earth's atmosphere, is like that of the stars. Frequently they fall to the earth as pyrites or so called thunder-stones; and they are incessantly falling in upon the sun in such immense numbers that eminent scientists regard them as the fuel that feeds its fires. Now it is quite conceivable that they should fall into the sun in greatly diminished numbers, the consequence of which would be a great diminution of its heat and light; and that they should fall upon the earth in vastly increased numbers; in which case, the appearance which they would present to the eye would be precisely that of falling stars; and the necessary effect of their impact upon the earth would be its combustion, as in the words, if they are to be taken literally: "The day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth, also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. iii. 10).

From such considerations as these, which might be greatly extended, it certainly is not irrational nor unscriptural to understand these physical phenomena as something more than mere symbols or images, as great cosmical disorders and convulsions, such as shall fitly correspond with and symbolize what will then be taking place in the moral world, the description of which immediately follows.

15 And the kings of the earth and the princes and the chief captains and the rich men and the mighty men and every bondman and freeman hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains: 16 and they say to the mountains and to the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; 17 for the great day of His wrath is come, and who is able to stand!

The judgments which have just been symbolized in physical phenomena are now represented as taking effect, awakening the most appalling terrors in the unsaved, being recognized as harbingers of 'the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men' (2 Pet. iii. 7). For the people of God are not men oned in this connection for the reason, no doubt, that

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their safety amidst these judgments is a matter of such importance that it cannot be treated of incidentally, but requires to be set forth by itself with all fulness and emphasis, as we shall find it in the next vision, the sealing of the cxliv thousand. It is the wicked alone who are overpowered by these terrors, and the copious enumeration given is evidently intended to include all classes of them, but especially the great and mighty among the 'earth dwellers'; although none will be too high or too low to be reached, for they will all seek to hide themselves from the face of God and from the wrath of the Lamb. In what follows there is a significant reference to the words of the Lord as He ascended mount Calvary bearing His cross: "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children; for, behold, the days come in which they shall say . . to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us" (Luke xxiii. 28–31): wherein also we see that what is here symbolized began to be fulfilled in the overthrow of that guilty city (20). In the last words also there is a reference to the prophecy:

> But who may abide the day of His coming?
> And who shall stand when He appeareth? (Mal. iii. 2).

The terrible force of the words, 'the wrath of the Lamb,' and 'the great day of His wrath,' 'of their wrath' in some texts, is evidently such that no other words can adequately express it; but we must not forget that they, like the anger, vengeance, jealousy, and fury of God are figures of speech to represent His justice, which is now to be administered and executed by the Lamb upon the ungodly world, who have made themselves guilty of His death by rejecting His mercy (144). For 'the government is laid upon His shoulder' (91), and "God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in justice by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts xvii. 31).

Such, then, was the vision of judgment which was seen by the beloved disciple, when the sixth seal of the book of

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God's secret purposes was opened by the Lamb. Here he gives us to behold the wicked of all classes stricken with the most appalling terrors, because the great day of God's justice has come upon them. The Christ whom they have crucified is about to judge them, and to require of them the sins of all preceding generations; for now must be fulfilled His words to the people of His day: "Behold, I send unto you prophets and wise men and scribes: some of them ye will kill and crucify, and some of them ye will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city; that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zachariah son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar: verily, I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation" (Mat. xxii. 34–36) (140). Now, therefore, the blood of all the martyrs, including that of the martyred Christ, shall be fully avenged. Now, the ancient wrong under which the earth has so long groaned shall be righted. Now all the injustice of kings and despots, and all the corruptions of popular governments as well; all the oppressions of the poor by the rich and great, and all the sins of the poor alike, down to the meanest slave; all the blood that has been shed in war, the guilt of which, as murder, must rest somewhere; all the crimes of intemperance, and all the impurities of social life; all the lying, cheating, overreaching, dishonesty in business; all the sins of thought, word, and deed, that have ever been committed: all shall now be brought to light, and punished as they deserve. In vain now do the guilty cry to the mountains and rocks to fall on them, and hide them from the face of Him that sitteth upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of His wrath is come, and who is able to stand! "Behold, the day cometh that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up" (Mal. iv. 1). Who, indeed, will be able to stand in that day? Certainly not those who thus seek to hide themselves in the caves and rocks of the mountains, but they only who, in this life, hide themselves in the cleft of the Rock of Ages.

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XVII

SEALING OF THE CXLIV THOUSAND SAFETY AND BLESSEDNESS OF THE ELECT VII 1–17

This vision seems best comprehended as a continuation of the disclosures of the sixth seal, thus representing the safety and blessedness of the people of God in immediate contrast with the judgments and terrors of the guilty world, as these have just been portrayed (149). For hitherto in these seal-openings, no mention has been made of the saints, with the exception of the souls of the martyrs under the altar (139), awaiting the judgments by which their blood should be avenged and their cause vindicated; and now that these judgments are imminent, what is to become of them in 'the great tribulation'? (Rev. vii. 14). Their safety must be provided for in fulfilment of the promise given them in the Epistle to the Philadelphian Church: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation which must come upon the whole world to tempt them that dwell upon the earth" (94). This, then, is the subject with which this closing vision is wholly occupied, so that nothing foreign is allowed to distract our attention.

1 After this, I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding fast the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow upon the earth, nor upon the sea, nor against any tree.

These angels are symbolical representations of the divine control and direction of the destructive forces of nature, which, indeed, are nothing but the energy of the will of God (111):

> Who maketh winds His messengers,
> His ministers a flaming fire (Ps. civ. 4).

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They are four in number, and they stand on or at the four corners of the earth, as representing the divine control of these forces in their totality (114); for winds are a symbol of the destructive forces of nature, by which the judgments of God are executed, as in the following passages: "The winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it (Mat. vii. 27). There came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead (Job i. 19).

> Thou didst blow with thy wind, the sea covered them;
> They sank as lead in the mighty waters (Ex. xv. 10).
> He bloweth upon them, and they wither,
> And the whirlwind taketh them away as stubble" (Is. xl. 24).

Thus in these four winds we have represented universal storms of judgment as about to come upon the world, but which must not be let loose until the Lord's people have been placed in a state of safety. The earth, the sea, and the trees are a comprehensive symbol of human life: the first, of the natural life of man in general; the second, of national life in particular (112); the third, of spiritual life, or of the want of it, according as the trees are fruitful or barren. But these symbols will recur in the sequel, where their meaning will more plainly appear (Rev. viii. 7–9).

2 And I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a great voice unto the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, 3 saying, Hurt not the earth, nor the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.

The beautiful symbolization of the book is here strikingly exemplified, in that this beneficent angel comes up from the east, literally from the rising of the sun, which dissipates the gloom and terrors of night, and pours the light of life and joy over the earth; also, in that he has authority over the angels of the winds, to prohibit them from letting loose their destructive forces; for, under the mediatorial government of the Lamb (122) the powers of life and good predominate over those of death and evil. Thus also in the prophet:

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"Behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east . . and the earth was lighted with His glory" (Ez. xliii. 2). The plural in the words, 'till we have sealed,' though but one angel appears with the seal, may have reference to the Lord's declaration: "He will send forth His angels, with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, and from one end of heaven to the other" (Mat. xxiv. 31). The angel cries with 'a great voice' (119) in order that he may be heard at the four corners of the earth, i. e. throughout the whole world.

The meaning of this symbolical sealing must be gathered from the uses of the seal, the most important of which is to keep anything secret and safe, as the exclusive property and possession of him whose seal it bears, so that no one else shall dare to appropriate or meddle with it, as in the words:

> Is not this laid up in store with me,
> Sealed up among my treasures? (Deut. xxxii. 34).

Hence those who are here sealed with the seal of the living God are thereby designated as His peculiar possession, and so precious to Him that He will by no means suffer them to be harmed by any destructive forces, all which are obliged to recognize and respect His seal; so that the sealed can say with perfect assurance:

> In the day of trouble He will hide me secretly in His pavilion;
> In the secret of His tabernacle will He hide me (Ps. xxvii. 5).
> Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I take refuge,
> Until calamities be overpast (lvii. 1).

The more special significance of this sealing may be seen in the following quotations: "The foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His (2 Tim. ii. 19). Who hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts (2 Cor. i. 22). In whom ye also, having believed, have been sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance, for the redemption of safe-keeping (Eph. i. 14). Whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (iv. 30). Here the servants of

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God are sealed 'on their foreheads' as the most conspicuous place, and to denote that their noblest faculties are possessed and consecrated by the Holy Spirit. Thus we see that this sealing distinguishes them as the subjects of the indwelling of the Spirit of the living God, as His peculiar possession, and under His guardianship and protection. Hence this great angel, who comes from the source of light and life, with absolute authority over all the destructive forces, and who places this seal upon the servants of God, must be recognized as at least a symbolical representative of the Lord Jesus, who sends forth His Holy Spirit into the hearts of His people, and thus seals them 'for the redemption of safekeeping.' We shall have hereafter other similar representations of Him as the great 'Angel of the covenant' (Mal. iii. 1).

4 And I heard the number of the sealed: cxliv thousand being sealed out of all the tribes of the sons of Israel. 5 Of the tribe of Judah xii thousand were sealed: of the tribe of Reuben xii thousand: of the tribe of Gad xii thousand: 6 of the tribe of Asher xii thousand: of the tribe of Naphtali xii thousand: of the tribe of Manasseh xii thousand: 7 of the tribe of Simeon xii thousand: of the tribe of Levi xii thousand: of the tribe of Issachar xii thousand: 8 of the tribe of Zabulon xii thousand: of the tribe of Joseph xii thousand: of the tribe of Benjamin xii thousand.

In this enumeration of the tribes, the order in which they are named and other particulars are thought to have some significance. Judah stands first, apparently for two reasons: (1) because this tribe very early superseded that of Reuben in the national leadership, and retained its pre-eminence in numbers and influence throughout the whole subsequent history; (2) because it included the whole line of the Lord's ancestors. The tribe of Ephraim is not mentioned under its proper name, but under that of Joseph, probably on account of its prominence in the rebellion and idolatry of 'Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin' (1 Ki. xiv. 16): for thus the unity of the national and religious life of the covenant people was rent asunder by a most baleful schism, from which, indeed, it never recovered. The tribe of Levi does not appear in its true genealogical place, but far down in the

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line, perhaps to denote that its peculiar function of the priesthood has ceased. But what is most remarkable is, that the tribe of Dan is omitted altogether, and its place in the sacred number xii is taken by that of Manasseh, one of the two sons of Joseph who were adopted by Jacob to become heads of tribes (Gen. xlviii. 5). This cannot be without significance, for the enumeration of the tribes by name seems to have been introduced chiefly for the purpose of laying emphasis upon it. How is it to be accounted for? The only probable explanation that has ever been suggested is the following: This tribe very early in its history abandoned its divine allotment in the land of Canaan (Judges xviii.), and settled within the borders of a sister tribe, in which it may have been mostly absorbed. At that time, also, it had apostatized to idolatry, from which it may never have been recovered: and afterwards the city of Dan was one of the two principal seats of the worship of Jeroboam's golden calves. Hence we have very significant prophecies concerning the fate of this tribe, such as the following: "They that swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, As thy god, O Dan, liveth . . even they shall fall, and never rise again" (Amos viii. 14). There was also an ancient Jewish tradition, that this tribe had become extinct before the time of Ezra, more than 500 years before Christ; in accordance with which it is left out of two of the Old Testament genealogies, although it is mentioned in some of the prophets. It may be, therefore, that it is here regarded as irrecoverably lost; and this becomes the more probable when we consider that otherwise there would have been xiii tribes, instead of xii, the number of absolute completeness (109); for that there were and could be but xii is evident from their being always mentioned as of this number; also, from the xii jewels in the high-priest's breastplate and the xii gates of the New Jerusalem, on both which their names were engraved; besides all which, we are here expressly informed that those here named were 'all the tribes of the sons of Israel.' Hence it may well have been under divine direction that Israel was unconsciously led to adopt the two sons of Joseph as heads of tribes, in order that the sacred number xii might

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be preserved. Moreover, it can hardly have been a mere coincidence, that there was a similar apostasy of one of the xii apostles of the Lord, in consequence of which his name disappears, in like manner, from the sacred roll, and is replaced by that of St. Paul; for the choice of Matthias by lot does not seem to have been sanctioned by divine authority (Acts i. 23–26), since of him we never afterwards hear one word: and that there could be but xii apostles is also evident from their being always mentioned as of this number, and from the xii foundation stones of the New Jerusalem upon which their names were inscribed. But in these apostasies of one of the tribes of Israel and of one of the apostles of the Lord we have some of the deep mysteries of Providence, concerning which we can only exclaim: "O the depth both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. xi. 33).

The question now comes before us. Who are these that are numbered and sealed? nor is it without difficulty. Are they a limited class of the people of God, or do they include them all? On the one side, they are a people numbered out of the xii tribes of Israel, whilst all the saved, as we shall immediately see, are an innumerable multitude out of all nations (Rev. vii. 9); also, in a subsequent vision, they are called 'firstfruits' (xiv. 4), as if they preceded the ingathering of the full harvest. Moreover, a class of believers are mentioned elsewhere as those 'who first hoped in Christ' (Eph. i. 12), which may be taken in connection with 'the general assembly and church of the firstborn' (Heb. xii. 23). But, on the other side, they are spoken of as 'the servants of God,' as if they included all such; and they are 'sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise,' which certainly applies to all true believers: and what is of still greater force is, that this sealing is evidently intended to place them in a state of security, so that they shall not be harmed by the impending judgments; but if this applies only to a limited number of the Lord's people, what is to become of the rest? Are they left to shift for themselves? In fine, the xii tribes, wherever they are

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introduced symbolically, represent the whole church on earth, including both true and false professors, as where St. James writes to 'the xii tribes which are of the dispersion' (James i. 1), by which He certainly means all professing Christians scattered throughout the world; and St. Paul also tells us that 'they are not all Israel who are of Israel' (Rom. ix. 6). The whole church being thus represented, those who are sealed out of it must be the true Israel of God, and the unsealed are mere nominal Christians. The number of the sealed, xii taken a thousand times out of each tribe, and the deep involution of this number in cxliv thousand, represent the absolute completeness of the elect church (109). The best solution of the acknowledged difficulties of this interpretation that I can suggest is, that in this part of the vision all true believers are viewed under the sole aspect of their being an elect people, those who are given by the Father unto the Son as the sure reward of His redeeming sacrifice, whom He recognizes and numbers as the sheep of His fold, so that not one of them shall ever be lost. Thus in the following and many similar declarations: "I am the good shepherd, and know mine own, and mine own know me (John x. 14). And this is the will of Him who hath sent me, that of all whom He hath given me I should lose none, but should raise them up at the last day. . . I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me out of the world (vi. 37–39). Those whom thou gavest me I have kept. . . I guarded them, and not one of them perished, but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. . . Holy Father, keep in thy name those whom thou hast given me" (xvii. 6–13). Some of these passages, it is true, have primary reference to the apostles, but to them certainly as representing all the elect; and they show what a deep impression they had made upon St. John's mind, and how susceptible he would be to such a revelation as this, in which the Lord's servants are viewed under the single aspect of their being an elect people, given unto Him by the Father 'for the redemption of safe-keeping unto the praise of His glory' (Eph. i. 14).

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9 After these things, I saw, and, behold, a great multitude which no man could number, out of every nation and [all] tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes and palms in their hands: 10 and they cry with a great voice, saying, The salvation be unto our God who sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb.

We have just seen the servants of God symbolically represented as a sealed and numbered people out of the xii tribes of Israel, but here they are presented under a different aspect, yet one of equal significance, as an innumerable multitude out of all nations, having passed safely through the judgments upon the world, and been received up into heaven, where they stand in the immediate presence of God and the Lamb, to whom with a great voice they ascribe the salvation unto which they have attained. Thus it is made to appear that the seal has effectually protected them: and when it shall have thus served its purpose, and they shall be gathered together in heaven, then it will be found that they have come out of the tribes of Israel only in a symbolical sense, but literally out of all nations; and that they are cxliv thousand in a like sense, but that literally and indeed they are a multitude which no man can number. Their white robes are the symbol of their purity and victory (85); this latter idea being strengthened by the palm-branches in their hands, as in the Roman poet, Palmæ pretium victoribus, which are significant also of their festive joy.

11 And all the angels were standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell upon their faces before the throne, and worshipped God, 12 saying, Amen; the blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be unto our God forever and forever, amen.

The whole host of the angels stand in the outmost circle around the throne and around the elders, their princes, and around the four living creatures, nature, yet as being so deeply interested in the great salvation that they fall upon their faces worshipping God, and give their solemn 'Amen' to the song of the saved; and immediately afterwards, from

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their own angelic point of view, they pour forth again their sevenfold doxology (14); in which, however, 'thanksgiving' takes the place of 'riches' in the former one (124), because the salvation is now viewed as an accomplished fact. For this reason, also, as it would seem, the worship of the Lamb is here swallowed up in that of God upon His eternal throne, reminding us of St. Paul's mysterious prophecy: "When all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that did put all things under Him, that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. xv. 28).

13 And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, These who are arrayed in white robes, who are they? and whence come they? 14 And I said unto him, My Lord, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they who came out of the great tribulation: and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. 15 Therefore, are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth upon the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. 16 They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike on them, nor any burning heat: 17 for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them, and lead them unto the fountains of the waters of life; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

We have here a dramatic scene of the deepest interest, in which one of the elders interprets to the Seer who the white-robed people are, and in which their blessed estate is portrayed in the most glowing word-pictures. For the word 'answered,' before any question has been asked, pictures the inquiring wonder on St. John's face; and hence one of the crowned elders comes down from his throne in the inmost circle to satisfy this inquiring wonder, and informs him that these white-robed people are they who have come safely through the great tribulation, through that 'hour of temptation' (94), with reference to which they had been sealed, and had such prophecies as the following: "There shall be a time of trouble, such as there never was since there was a nation . . and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book (Dan. xii. 1). Then shall there be a great tribulation, such as hath not

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been from the beginning of the world. . . . And except those days should be shortened, no flesh would be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Mat. xxiv. 21–22). Through all this tribulation of the last times this innumerable multitude have come unharmed, because they were sealed with the seal of the living God, and had 'washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb'; i. e. they had purified themselves from sin, and had obtained the victory over their temptations (85), through the efficacy of the Lord's most holy sacrifice, which is the only possible purification for defiled souls. 'Therefore,' they now stand before God, and serve Him unceasingly in His temple, i. e. in the church of the saved in heaven (95). Here He spreads His tabernacle over them, and dwells with them. The sun does not strike upon them, nor any burning heat, in fulfilment of the promise:

> The sun shall not smite thee by day,
> Nor the moon by night (Ps. cxxi. 6).

Here they are exempt from hunger and thirst, their spiritual need being fully satisfied, because the Lamb, whose place is in the midst of the throne (120), is their shepherd, and leads them, as His pure and peaceful flock, to the very fountains of the waters of life, which flow forth eternally out of His throne (Rev. xxii. 1): "For the good Shepherd . . calleth His sheep by name, and leadeth them out. . . . He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him (John x. 1–6).

> The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;
> He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
> He leadeth me beside the still waters" (Ps. xxiii. 8).

In the last of these glowing beatitudes, there are plain references to the prophecies: "The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces (Is. xxv. 8). Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mat. v. 4). For thus the heavenly Father will wipe away all tears from the eyes of His beloved children, comforting them concerning the great tribulation through which they have passed, 'as one whom his mother comforteth' (Is. lxvi. 13).

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Such is the assured safety of the Lord's people, while they pass through the judgments about to be disclosed in the subsequent visions, and such is the blessedness to which they shall attain, after having passed through these judgments. And this lovely picture is here placed before us, not only to refresh and cheer our hearts while we are in this 'valley of Weeping' (Ps. lxxxiv. 6), but also to strengthen us so that we may be enabled to contemplate without being stunned the awful disclosures of the seventh seal. For in them the judgments, which hitherto have been only foreshadowed, will be presented in ampler details, in more lurid lights, in darker colors. Meanwhile, let us carry this picture in our hearts for our exceeding great and precious consolation; bearing in mind always that the true service of God, whether in this life, or that which is to come, is one of unceasing activity and usefulness. For no ecstasy of vision, no entranced meditation, no height or fulness of revelation, can justify us for neglecting the work of the Master, which He has entrusted to our hands. And let us not fail to yield ourselves unto God, that He may set His seal upon our foreheads, and number us with His own. For without this seal, no one will be able to pass in safety through the great tribulation, that 'hour of temptation which must come upon all the world to tempt them that dwell upon the earth' (94). They who shall be found in that hour without the seal of the living God will surely suffer all the judgments and plagues which are written in this book.

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XVIII

THE SEVENTH SEAL THE JUDGMENTS OF GOD IN ANSWER TO THE PRAYERS OF THE SAINTS VIII 1–6

In this vision the very complex structure of the book begins to appear. For although the first series of revelations, that of the seven churches, is clearly divided from the second, that of the seven-sealed roll, yet the third series, that of the seven trumpets, commences here at the opening of the seventh seal. In like manner, as we shall see hereafter, the seven last plagues are evolved out of the visions of the last trumpet. In this way, the book of God's purposes and providence contains, as it ought, all the subsequent revelations (118). This series of the seven trumpets is introduced by a wonderful heaven-scene which the Apocalyptist now proceeds to describe.

1 And when He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about half an hour.

The imagery of this vision has a constant reference to the tabernacle and temple service, especially to the ministry of the officiating priest, when he burned incense upon the golden altar which stood in the sanctuary before the veil of the Holy of Holies (Ex. xxx. 1–10); within which, behind the veil, was the ark of the covenant, with its mercy-seat of pure gold, and the shekinah (xxv 10–22), a constant blaze of supernatural light, which represented the presence and glory of the God of Israel. For while the priest was thus burning incense, the people stood without engaged in silent prayer. Hence it is said of Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist, when he received the prediction of the birth of his illustrious son: "While he executed the priest's office . . his lot was to

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enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense, and the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the hour of incense" (Luke i. 8–10). And it seems to be in allusion to the time usually occupied in this service that this half hour's silence in heaven is mentioned; which, therefore, is to be understood of the whole heavenly host, engaged in silent worship while the priestly angel ministers at the celestial altar of incense; and this silence is significant also of the overpowering awe which they feel whilst the tremendous disclosures of His ministry pass before their eyes.

2 And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and there were given unto them seven trumpets.

The number 'seven' here, as in the case of the seven churches, is to be taken both in its literal and symbolical import (30); for doubtless the Seer beheld seven angels with seven trumpets, but this number, rather than any other, to denote the fulness of the judgments which they were to announce (14). Whether, in fact, there are seven angels who stand before God in any peculiar sense cannot be determined from this symbolical representation, but further light may be thrown upon the question in the sequel. The uses of the trumpet among the Hebrews were many and various, two of which seem to be alluded to here: (1) That of calling a solemn assembly upon occasion of any important transaction: "Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly" (Joel ii. 15). Hence we may understand that these trumpeting angels are to call an assembly of the universe to behold the awful spiritual transactions which are about to take place; i. e. as we shall see, the avenging of the blood of the martyrs, and the vindication of their cause, by the judgments of God upon the guilty world (139), as foreshadowed at the opening of the sixth seal (149). (2) It was at the blowing of seven trumpets for seven days around the city of Jericho that its walls fell, and the people of God took possession of it (Josh. vi. 1–20); in allusion to which the judgments of the last times are represented as follows:

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That day is a day of wrath,
A day of trouble and distress,
A day of wasteness and desolation,
A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
A day of the trumpet and alarm,
Against the fenced cities and corner towers (Zeph. i. 15-16).

Hence we may understand, what we shall find to be so, that the judgments upon the world announced by these trumpets will overthrow its defences, and break down its opposition to the Lord and His kingdom.

3 And another angel came and stood over the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should add it to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne; 4 and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

Upon the golden altar of the tabernacle incense was burned, or fumed, every morning and evening. Once a year, also, the high priest took a censer, filled it with fire apparently from this altar, and, having a handful of incense, went into the Holy of Holies, and there sprinkled the incense upon the fire in the censer, so that its smoke went up from his hand before the glory of God over the mercy seat (Lev. xvi. 12-13). This incense was composed of the most costly and precious spices (Ex. xxx. 34-38). How striking and significant are the allusions to all this in the vision which is here made to pass before our eyes! For no one who has paid any attention to the symbols of this book, or to those of the Mosaic ritual, can have a doubt but that every one of these particulars is loaded with significance. But what do they mean? What is signified by the incense, by its being consumed with fire, by its being added to the prayers of the saints, by its smoke going up with these prayers out of the angel's hand, and who is this angel that offers it? These questions throw so much light upon each other that it is hard to decide which should be answered first. For this altar was the altar of prayer, and it was of gold to signify the preciousness of the prayers of the saints, as we have seen them represented by golden chalices full of

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incense (123). The incense offered upon it signified these prayers in a general way, as in the Psalmist:

> Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense,
> And the lifting up of my hands as the evening oblation (Ps. cxli. 2).

But more particularly and precisely it represented what renders the prayers of the saints acceptable and prevalent with God. Yet it was inefficacious for this purpose until it was consumed by fire, which caused its smoke and perfume to go up before God: it was the consuming fire which gave it all its efficacy, just as the sacrifices of the brazen altar, which stood in the court of the tabernacle, were inefficacious to make atonement for sin until they were consumed by fire: and in both cases, as throughout this book, fire is the symbol of the justice of God (36). Hence, as all interpreters agree, this incense, both in the tabernacle service, and as offered by the angel here, represents the righteousness, merits, and intercession of the Lord Jesus Christ in His atoning sacrifice, as giving all their efficacy to the prayers of His people. Hence it is here said to be 'much' in quantity, and to be 'added' or given to these prayers, to signify the abundance of His merit, and that it imparts unto them an all-prevailing power. Consequently the angel who offers this incense has been commonly recognized as the Lord in person. But with this interpretation I cannot concur, and that, for two reasons: (1) He is called 'another angel,' and I can conceive of no good reason why the Lord of glory should be so designated; (2) We have seen the princes of the angelic host offering the prayers of the saints, as golden chalices full of incense, unto the Lamb (123). Yet he who ministers at this heavenly altar may properly be regarded as a symbolical representative of the Lord in His character of the great 'Angel of the covenant,' as He has appeared before (155), which is enough surely to render the whole representation exceedingly precious, as it has ever been, to all praying souls.

In the light of this angelic ministry with respect to the prayers of the saints, we may now recur to the expression,

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'the seven angels who stand before God' (164), by which the trumpeters are characterized, and which has a precision that can hardly be without significance. For it may possibly refer to some genuine revelation which has not come down to us in our canonical Scriptures, such as the following from the apocryphal book of Tobit: "I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who carry up the prayers of the saints, and who enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One" (Tobit xii. 15): besides which, we have seen the angelic Thrones and Dominions, and here we see 'another angel,' offering the prayers of the saints unto God: from all which we may gather perhaps that angels have a ministry with respect to these prayers beyond what we commonly ascribe to them, and which may be thus obscurely intimated to guard us against the prevalent temptation to worship them.

5 And the angel took the censer, and filled it with the fire of the altar, and cast it upon the earth; and there followed thunders and voices and lightnings and earthquake. 6 And the seven angels that had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound their trumpets.

There seems to be an allusion here to an apocalyptic vision of one of the Old Testament prophets in which the command is given: "Go in between the wheels under the cherub, and fill both thy hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city" (Ez. x. 2). But there are differences, for this censer is the same from which the incense, with the prayers of the saints, has just gone up before God, and this fire is taken from the altar of prayer, to denote that the divine justice is now about to take effect, in answer to these prayers, for the avenging of the blood of the martyrs, and the purification of human life, of which last the earth is the constant symbol (153). The thunders and voices and lightnings are to be understood as proceeding out of the throne, and as representing the forces of nature (111); the earthquake, or universal trembling, being that of the sixth seal (146). But here these forces are represented as excited to preternatural destructiveness by

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the fire of divine justice; and thus in their quickened activity they symbolize the perturbations and convulsions which are produced by these judgments in human life, when God sends them forth to vindicate His people. The same view is presented by the Psalmist in the following picture:

> In my distress I called upon the Lord,
> And cried unto my God:
> He heard my voice out of His temple,
> And my cry came before Him into His ears.
> Then the earth shook and trembled,
> The foundations also of the mountains moved,
> And were shaken because He was wroth.
> There went up a smoke out of His nostrils,
> And fire out of His mouth devoured:
> Coals were kindled by it.
> He bowed the heavens also and came down;
> And thick darkness was under His feet.
> And He rode upon a cherub and did fly;
> Yea, He flew swiftly upon the wings of the wind.
> He made darkness His hiding place,
> His pavilion round about Him;
> Darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies.
> At the brightness before Him His thick clouds passed,
> Hailstones and coals of fire.
> The Lord also thundered in the heavens,
> And the Most High uttered His voice,
> Hailstones and coals of fire.
> And He sent out His arrows, and scattered them;
> Yea, lightnings manifold, and discomfited them.
> Then the channels of the waters were seen,
> And the foundations of the world were discovered,
> At thy rebuke, O Lord,
> At the blast of the breath of Thy nostrils.
> He sent from on high, He took me,
> He drew me out of great waters (Ps. xviii. 6–17).

All that is thus foreshadowed will be fully realized when these seven angels, who have now placed their trumpets to their lips, shall blow their fearful blasts.

But that which is most wonderful in all this, and which the 'idyllic' sentimentalism of our time seems to have quite lost sight of, is, that the divine judgments are represented as coming upon the world in answer to the prayers of the saints. In order to understand this, we must bear in mind that the

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great burden of these prayers is that the Lord's kingdom may come; but it cannot come in all its fulness otherwise than by means of these judgments, as in a multitude of prophecies:

> He will judge among the nations,
> He will fill the places with dead bodies (Ps. cx. 6).
> He will wound the heads over many countries. . . .
> He will declare judgment unto the Gentiles. . . .
> He will send forth judgment unto victory;
> And in His name shall the Gentiles trust (Mat. xii. 18–21).

Moreover, that the coming of His kingdom necessarily implies great and sore judgments upon the world; that at every stage of its progress there must be a corresponding stage of judgment; this is exemplified in the whole history of the church and the world.

1. There was such a judgment in the Noachian deluge. And how importunately the few saints in those days must have prayed that God would bring to an end that abounding wickedness! What incessant prayers must they have offered up that He would hasten the fulfilment of the only promise they seem to have had, that 'the Seed of the woman should crush the serpent's head'! (Gen. iii. 15). But when the time came that some answer could be given to these prayers, that answer was by a flood upon the ungodly, which 'took them all away' (Mat. xxiv. 39), and ushered in the dispensation of the rainbow.

2. How was the deliverance of the covenant people from the bondage in Egypt effected? We know how they cried unto God for such deliverance, until He heard their cries, and came down upon their cruel taskmasters with great and sore judgments, even to the cutting off of their children, 'from the firstborn of Pharaoh upon the throne to the firstborn of the captive in the dungeon' (Ex. xii. 29). All this is familiar as a household tale: it is only the principle which it represents that is so strangely left out of mind.

3. We know also by what a vast series of prophecies the advent of the Lord was heralded; what glowing expectations they awakened; how it was the object of unceasing prayer;

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and what warnings were given that it would be a day of the most searching judgments. But all these warnings were in vain; for when He came, it was with such overwhelming judgments as swept away at least a million of the people, destroyed their holy city and temple, and scattered the survivors over the world without a country or nationality, as they remain to this day.

4. And American slavery, its overthrow was longed and prayed for during several generations, not only by the slaves themselves, but also by the people of God throughout the world. How were these prayers answered? Why, by the judgment of a fearful rebellion and civil war, in which property to the amount of thousands of millions was destroyed, and not less than a million of human beings perished.

Thus has it ever been, and thus, as we are here admonished, will it continue to be unto the final consummation. The establishment of the Lord's kingdom means judgment upon the evil that is in the world, and upon all who identify themselves with that evil. Even in individual souls, its coming means judgment; for every one of His people must be crucified with Him and die unto self, the world, and sin, in order to be raised with Him unto the new life of self-sacrifice and self-consecration to God. For it is thus, and not otherwise, that He sends forth His judgment unto victory over the evil that is in the world.

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XIX

THE FIRST FOUR TRUMPETS JUDGMENTS UPON NATURAL POLITICAL INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL LIFE VIII 7–12

The first four trumpets correspond in several particulars to the first four seals: especially in that they constitute a series or class by themselves; in that they are of a different order of symbols from the three following (127); and in that the judgments in both are connected with the natural forces. But there are important differences: for in the seals, the plagues of war, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts are inflicted by means of these forces, including the agency of man, in their normal and uniform operations, in the regular course of nature; whereas in the trumpets these forces are excited to preternatural destructiveness by the fire of divine justice cast upon the earth (167), in answer to the prayers of the saints that the Lord's kingdom may come, and to avenge the blood of the martyrs (143). Hence these judgments are much more severe than those, extending to one-third, in place of one-fourth, of that upon which they fall, and to the spiritual as well as the natural life of man, which before was prohibited (131). Yet even this must be understood to have a benevolent object, as a necessary means, in the mysterious providence of God, unto the final subjugation of the rebellious world. Still another important difference is, that in those seals the judgments stand for what they are in themselves; the things which take place in nature are themselves the plagues; whereas in these trumpets the disturbances and convulsions described are symbolical of analogous convulsions in the life of mankind. These judgments, moreover, are to be comprehended as a further unfolding in particulars

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of what follows from the angel's casting the fire of the altar of prayer upon the earth (167), and of the phenomena of the sixth seal (146).

7 And the first [angel] sounded his trumpet: and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and a third part of the earth was burned up; and a third part of the trees was burned up; and all the green grass was burned up.

There is here a significant reference to the seventh Egyptian plague: "The Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down unto the earth: and the Lord rained hail upon the land of Egypt: so there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous. . . . And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail smote every herb of the field, and broke every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were, was there no hail" (Ex. ix. 23–26). The combination of hail and fire reminds us that extreme cold scorches vegetation like fire. Other effects of the hail are not mentioned here, yet they are implied, predominance being given to the fire for reasons that will presently appear. In this plague the hail and fire are mingled with blood, apparently that of the martyrs; for all martyr blood falls upon the world in the sense in which the crucifiers of the great Head-Martyr cried out: "His blood be upon us and upon our children" (Mat. xxvii. 25). But whence is this fire? Evidently from the altar of prayer in heaven, from which it has been taken by the angel, and cast upon the earth (167); for what appeared in his hand as but a censer full of coals has become to those upon whom it falls a hailstorm of fire. Under this judgment a third part of the earth is burned up; which signifies that a third part of mankind perishes, for the earth is the constant symbol of man's natural life (153); yet, neither here nor in what follows, is this third part to be rigorously taken, but rather in the general sense of a very large proportion. A third part of the trees, also, is burned up; and trees are a common symbol of human beings with respect to spiritual life; fruitful trees, of the possessors of true piety, as in the following:

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And he shall be like a tree planted by the water-courses,
That bringeth forth its fruit in its season (Ps. i. 3).
That they might be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He might be glorified (Is. xli. 3):

and barren trees, with nothing but leaves, of professors without piety, as in our Lord's parable of the Barren Fig Tree (Luke xiii. 6–9), and where they are called: "Autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, and plucked up by the roots" (Jude 12). Hence what is here signified is, that under this judgment a third part of the members of the church are cut off. It is to be carefully observed that, not barely a third, but all of the green grass is burned up; for grass is a Scriptural symbol of the wicked:

When the wicked spring as grass,
And when all the workers of iniquity do flourish;
It is that they shall be destroyed forever (Ps. xcii. 7).
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither like the green herb (xxxvii. 2).

Thus we see that under this judgment all the wicked do perish sooner or later, in fulfilment of all the prophecies concerning them, such as the following: "As the tares are gathered up, and burned with fire, so shall it be in the end of the world: the Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire" (Mat. xiii. 41–42). As to the historical events here contemplated, they evidently belong to the close of the dispensation, but not in any such sense as to exclude precursory judgments; nor are they to be regarded as altogether prior or subsequent to those of the other trumpets.

8 And the second angel sounded his trumpet: and, as it were, a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea; and a third part of the sea became blood; 9 and a third part of the creatures that were in the sea, and had life, died; and a third part of the ships was destroyed.

This mountain is pictured as having become a burning mass by the fire from the altar of prayer, rained upon the

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earth (167); as uprooted and cast into the sea by the earthquake that followed, by which 'every mountain and island were moved out of their place' (146): and mountains are a common symbol of what is most stable in the conditions of human life:

> Who by His strength setteth fast the mountains (Ps. lxv. 6).
> Therefore will not we fear, though the earth do change,
> And though the mountains be moved into the midst of the seas xlvi. 2).

The sea itself is the constant symbol of national life in its stormy agitations (112), as in the following: "A great nation . . their voice roareth like the sea (Jer. vi. 22–23). There shall be . . distress of nations in perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring (Luke xxi. 24–25). The waters which thou sawest . . are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues" (Rev. xvii. 15). Hence the creatures in the sea must be taken to signify political organizations; and the ships to represent cities or municipalities, as where the city of Tyre is symbolized by a ship: "Thy rowers have brought thee into great waters: the east wind hath broken thee in the midst of the seas. . . . Thy mariners and thy pilots . . . shall fall into the midst of the seas in the day of thy ruin" (Ez. xxvii. 26). Hence this burning mountain, shaken from its foundations by the shock of the earthquake and precipitated into the midst of the sea, whereby its waters become deeply tinged with blood, and a great proportion of the living creatures and of the ships perish, is to be understood as representing that whatever is most stable in man's earthly life is thrown into confusion, national organizations are subverted, cities and municipalities are overthrown, and the political world is deluged in blood. But here again the historical realization of this judgment is not to be limited to the close of the dispensation in any such sense as to exclude similar commotions whenever they may occur.

10 And the third angel sounded his trumpet: and there fell from heaven a great star burning as a torch; and it fell upon a third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters: 11 and the name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third part of the waters became wormwood; and much people died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

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In the vision of the sixth seal, we have seen 'the stars falling from heaven, as a fig-tree casteth her untimely fruit, when she is shaken by a great wind,' in the sense that subordinate intellectual luminaries cease to shine, as it were from heaven, and become earthly and delusive (147); but here we have one great burning star falling from heaven upon the rivers and fountains, by which it should seem that Satan is meant, for in the next vision we shall find him unmistakably symbolized as a star that had fallen from heaven. Fountains and rivers are a chosen symbol of the sources and streams of spiritual life, with special reference to the truth of God, in which that life originates, by which also it is nourished and perfected, as in our Lord's conversation with the woman at the well of Samaria (John iv. 5–15), in the promise that 'the Lamb would lead His saved people to the fountains of the waters of life' (Rev. vii. 17), and in 'the river of the water of life flowing forth out of the throne of God and the Lamb' (xxii. 1). Hence we see here the agency of Satan corrupting the truths of the gospel, and spiritual life as depending upon them, by false doctrines and fatal heresies; the destructive influence of which is emphasized by the name of the star 'Wormwood,' and by the bitterness of the waters: all which is interpreted in the statement, that much people, literally 'many of the men,' died of these bitter waters, by which spiritual death must, of course, be understood. As a partial fulfilment of this prophecy, we have the heresies of gnosticism, Sabellianism, Eutychianism, Arianism, Pelagianism, Socinianism, Spiritualism, and many others, by which the waters of life have been and still are fearfully corrupted and poisoned; all which are here represented as judicial inflictions. Whether yet worse than these are to be anticipated in the last times, the future will decide.

12 And the fourth angel sounded his trumpet: and a third part of the sun was smitten, and a third part of the moon, and a third part of the stars; that a third part of them should be darkened; and the day should not shine for a third part of it, and the night, in like manner.

The imagery here, as in the previous trumpets, diverges considerably from that of the sixth seal, but apparently for

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the purpose only of expressing different shades of the same ideas (146). This darkening of the heavenly bodies may be conceived of as either local or dynamical, i. e. as an obscuration of a third part of their disks, or as a suppression of a third part of their light. It is not quite certain which is intended, nor is it a matter of any importance in such a symbolical representation. We have here, however, another point in which these trumpets correspond to the first four seals, namely, in that the three preceding supply us with a key to the fourth (135). For since we have seen a blight falling upon (1) the natural life of man in general, (2) his political and municipal organizations, (3) his spiritual life, nothing remains to be blighted but (4) his intellectual, moral, and spiritual light, of the sources and supplies of which the heavenly bodies are the recognized symbols (147). Such a darkening of this light, moreover, would necessarily result from the blight upon life, for 'the life is the light of men' (John i. 4). Hence, as in the preceding trumpet the sources and streams of life are poisoned, so in this one the common and mediate luminaries of the world are darkened, the greater and lesser lights are obscured; i. e. men of eminent genius and piety are wanting, and inferior minds give out even less than their accustomed light. A great many prophecies refer to this judgment, of which the following are examples:

> I will cover the sun with a cloud,
> And the moon shall not give her light:
> All the bright lights of heaven will I make dark over thee;
> And I will set darkness upon thy land, saith the Lord God (Ez. xxxii. 7–8).
> There shall not be light;
> The bright ones shall contract themselves . . .
> Not day nor night (Zech. xiv. 6–7).

As to the realization of this judgment in the history of the church and the world, we have had the 'dark ages' from the fifth century to the fifteenth; and we may have much more of similar darkness in the last times, before all the blood of the martyrs shall be fully avenged, and their cause vindicated.

One of the many lessons of these four trumpets, taken in

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connection with the preceding vision of the fire of the altar of prayer cast upon the earth (167), and with that of the souls of the martyrs under the altar of burnt sacrifices (139), is the tremendous significance of the martyrology of the church. All Christians ought to be well acquainted with it. For it was through the sacrifice of those witnesses for the Lord and His cause who counted not their lives dear unto themselves, but sealed their testimony with their blood, that the gospel and the Christian religion have come down to us, and that we enjoy the priceless blessings of what is, at least in some sort, a Christian civilization. We think too little of all this, and have too little gratitude and sympathy for those who died for us and our children, and far too little of their spirit. For their cause required to be vindicated by such judgments as these in order that it might become as precious to us as it was to them, and that we should stand ready to endure as much for it as they endured. Thus only, indeed, can we ever come to share in their glory and reward.

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XX

THE FIFTH TRUMPET THE TORMENTS OF HUMAN LIFE VIII 13 IX 1–12

The three following trumpets are of a different character from the four preceding, as is plainly indicated by an eagle flying in midheaven, which intervenes between the two series. One difference is, that, in the former, the judgments are symbolized in phenomena produced by the natural forces in a state of preternatural excitement and commotion (171); whereas, in the first two of these three judgments, the regular course of nature is undisturbed; the order of procedure in the seals being thus reversed (127). Another is, that, in the former, the dominant idea is the avenging of the blood of the martyrs; but, in the latter, whilst this idea is not lost sight of, yet it recedes into the background, and gives place to judgments upon sin and wickedness in general; upon that in man from which martyr persecutions, 'idolatries, murders, fornications, thefts' (Rev. ix. 21), and all other abominations proceed.

13 And I saw and heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a great voice, Woe, woe, woe to them that dwell upon the earth for the remaining voices of the trumpet of the three angels who are yet to sound their trumpets.

In the English Bible we have 'an angel' in place of this eagle, which probably found its way into the text of inferior manuscripts from an attempt of some copyist at explanation. The eagle is here introduced as a symbol for several qualities, among which are its loftiness in flight, in consequence of which it possesses an immense extent of vision, and the power, which has always been ascribed to it, of looking openly in the face of the sun. For these qualities

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apparently it seems to be taken here as a symbol of apocalyptic vision, which soars to the loftiest heights, looks with open eyes upon the blazing sun of revelation, and contemplates an immense field of providence and history. Hence, from time immemorial, the eagle has been the received symbol of St. John, regarded as the noblest example of such vision, although we must not forget that it is the idea, and not the apocalyptist himself, that is here represented. This eagle flies in midheaven and proclaims with a great voice, that all the dwellers upon earth may hear, the three great woes which are about to be disclosed as divine judgments (136). But the order of time in which they are made to pass before us is not, as we shall see, that of the events historically considered, but that in which they are presented in vision to the eye of the Seer.

1 And the fifth angel sounded his trumpet: and I saw a star fallen from heaven unto the earth; and there was given unto him the key of the pit of the abyss.

The Seer does not say I saw a star 'fall,' as in the English Bible, but 'fallen,' for this fall had taken place long before (174), as we shall see in a subsequent vision (Rev. xii. 7–9). In fact, this fallen star is a symbol of Satan; and he is so called apparently in allusion to the king of Babylon, represented as 'the prince of this world':

> How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning . .
> And thou saidst in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven;
> I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. . . .
> I will be like the Most High (Is. xiv. 12–13):

in connection with which we may recall the words of the Lord: "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven" (Luke x. 18). This interpretation of the symbol rests upon the following considerations: (1) The star represents a personal being, to whom the personal pronoun 'he' is constantly applied: (2) He is called 'the angel of the abyss' (Rev. xx. 3), to whom its key is given; and the abyss is the place in which Satan is shut up during the millennium; also the place of demons, or devils, into which they entreat that they may not

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be sent, but may be permitted to enter into the swine (Mat. viii. 31): (3) He is the 'king' of the demon host which, in this vision, he liberates from the abyss, that they may swarm over the earth, and torment mankind: (4) His names, in Hebrew and Greek, are Abaddon and Apollyon, which signify destruction and destroyer. For these reasons it would seem impossible to misunderstand the symbol, though it has often been strangely enough misunderstood.

2 And he opened the pit of the abyss; and there went up smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun was darkened, and the air, by the smoke of the pit.

In the English Bible, the pit of the abyss is rendered, with matchless picturesque effect, 'the bottomless pit,' but the precise meaning is, the depth or lowest deep of the abyss. The smoke which escapes from it is the symbol of torment, as where it is said of the beast-worshippers: "The smoke of their torment goeth up forever and ever" (Rev. xiv. 11). This smoke darkens the sun, the light of man's earthly life, and the air, which is the medium of sunlight and the breath of life (147), to signify that this torment produces darkness and confusion of mind in the life-sphere of rebellious souls (176).

3 And out of the smoke there came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given unto them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.

The Seer now beholds, coming forth out of the abyss in the smoke of its torment, a swarm of demon-like creatures under the general aspect of locusts, to denote their countless numbers and their enormous powers of destruction; for, in these respects, a swarm of locusts baffles all computation and description. Not long ago such a swarm perished in the sea near the coast of south Africa east of the Cape of Good Hope, and were thrown up on the shore in banks three feet deep, and many miles in length, from which resulted a pestilence that ravaged all the neighboring country: a similar event occurred also on the west coast of northern Africa in

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the kingdom of Morocco. There seems to be a reference here to the Egyptian plague of locusts, which Moses thus describes: "The locusts went up over all the land of Egypt. . . . They covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened: and they did eat every herb . . and all the fruit of the trees . . and there remained not any green thing, either tree or herb of the field, through all the land of Egypt" (Ex. x. 14–15). But the most graphic description of this scourge that is to be found perhaps in all literature is given us by a later prophet, to which, in this vision, there are a number of allusions:

A nation is come up upon my land, strong and without number:
His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the cheek teeth of a great lion. . . .
Gird yourselves [with sackcloth] and lament, ye priests:
Howl, ye ministers of the altar:
Come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God. . . .
Sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly;
Gather the elders, all the inhabitants of the land,
Unto the house of the Lord your God,
And cry unto the Lord. . . .
How do the beasts groan!
The herds of cattle are perplexed,
Because they have no pasture;
Yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate. . .
A great people and a strong. . . .
A fire devoureth before them,
And behind them a flame burneth:
The land is as the Garden of Eden before them,
And behind them a desolate wilderness. . . .
The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses,
And as war horses so do they run:
Like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains do they leap;
Like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble;
As a strong people set in battle array. . . .
They run like mighty men;
They climb the wall like men of war;
And they march every one on his ways,
And they break not their ranks. . . .
When they burst through the weapons
They are not wounded (Joel i. and ii.).

The locusts of this vision have also the power of scorpions, and we shall see directly why this comparison is chosen.

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4 And it was said unto them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only people, those that have not the seal of God on their foreheads.

They are forbidden to hurt the productions of the earth, as natural locusts would, to signify that they are not such in reality, but have the origin and nature of demons, powers or influences from the pit. In what sense they are to harm only the unsealed we shall see hereafter.

5 And unto them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it striketh a man: 6 and in those days, people shall seek death, and shall not find it, and shall desire to die, and death fleeth from them.

We are now prepared to grapple with this elaborate symbol and to extort its meaning; for it has given rise to 'an endless Babel of allegorical and historical interpretations,' in view of which Dean Alford, perhaps the most sober and sage of the commentators, gives up the problem in despair. Most of them, however, interpret the vision as a prophecy of the rise and ravages of Mohammedanism; but their attempts to reconcile this with the statement, that these demon locusts are not permitted to kill men, but only to torment them during life, involve these commentators, as may be imagined, in the most grotesque perplexities. In contrast with all this, I venture to suggest that it is precisely in this statement we have what is intended to serve as the key of the whole symbol. For it contains an evident allusion to the case of the patriarch Job, whom Satan was permitted to torment until he longed to die, but was absolutely forbidden to take his life: "And the Lord said unto Satan, He is in thy hand, only spare his life. So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. . . . After this Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day (Job ii. 6–7):

> Let the day perish wherein I was born,
> And the night which said, A man child is conceived. . . .
> Why died I not from the womb? . .
> Why did the knees receive me? . .

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Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery,
And life unto the bitter in soul;
Who long for death, and it cometh not. . .
Who rejoice unto exultation
And are glad when they can find the grave?" (iii. 1–23).

Now, in this pointed allusion to the experience of Job, it seems to be not obscurely intimated that these demon locusts are intended to symbolize the torments and miseries of human life in general, but with special reference to diseases of body and mind, such as do not destroy life, but are the bane of its comfort and happiness while it lasts; and this interpretation is strongly confirmed by most of the other particulars in the symbol. For these torments and maladies are innumerable as a swarm of locusts, and they are infinitely destructive of all that renders life endurable. They come up out of the abyss in the smoke of its torment, which darkens the sun and air, to denote that they obscure, as torment naturally does, the intellectual, moral, and spiritual light and life-sphere of mankind; and they are liberated out of the abyss by Satan, to signify that they originate from sin, apart from which there would have been no more place for them in this world than there is in heaven. Moreover, this representation of the origin of the diseases and torments of human life runs through the whole Scripture, as in this case of Job; in our Lord's casting out of the devils or demons that caused paralysis, epilepsy, insanity, with other bodily and mental diseases; in His healing by spiritual power all manner of sicknesses and infirmities. It is confirmed also by the manifest tendency of the Christian religion to promote the health, comfort, and happiness of mankind; for as the life that is in Christ comes to be more fully received, and more perfectly realized, the influences which are destructive of physical and mental health become less operative (137), and those which promote it increase in efficiency; until, as the final result, when sin shall be done away, 'there shall be no more . . sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain' (Rev. xxi. 4). The only particulars thus far which do not seem to agree with this interpretation are the time, 'five

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months,' during which the locusts are to continue, and that they are to hurt those only who have not the seal of God on their foreheads (157); which latter seems, at first sight, to be palpably inconsistent with the fact that Job, the best man of his times, was so grievously tormented. But it may be understood in the sense that these torments have no power to harm the true children of God, to whom they are means of grace and blessing, as they actually proved in Job's case, and according to St. Paul's declarations: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God (Rom. ii. 28). For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. iv. 17). Yet, as disciplinary chastisements, they often cause even good people to despair of life, and long to die, while death seems to flee from them. The 'five months' will occur again hereafter, and require to be considered. Having thus put into our hands his own key of the symbol, that we may apply it to the remaining particulars, our Seer now proceeds with his elaborate description of the locusts.

7 And the similitudes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared for battle; and upon their heads were crowns, as it were like unto gold; and their faces were as the faces of men; 8 and they had hair as the hair of women; and their teeth were as of lions; 9 and they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle; 10 and they have tails like unto scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt people five months. 11 They have a king over them, the angel of the abyss: his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he hath the name Apollyon.

The torments and miseries of human life are like horses prepared for battle, in that their attacks are made with such impetus and rapidity that they cannot be avoided (129); and this idea, along with that of their vast numbers, is still further emphasized by the sound of their wings, which is like that of 'chariots of many horses running to battle.' They have crowns to denote that their power over mankind is like that of kings (135); and these crowns are like unto gold, as the

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chalices which contain the seven last plagues are of gold (Rev. xv. 7), to represent the preciousness of the divine judgments as means to establish the Lord's kingdom (33). They have the faces of men and the hair of women, to signify that they are of either sex, that they affect both sexes alike. They have the teeth of lions, to denote their remorseless, lacerating, crushing power. They have breastplates as of iron, in allusion to the prophet's description, 'When they burst through the weapons, they are not wounded' (Joel ii. 8), to signify that they are invulnerable in the sense that no human power is able to destroy them, nor to diminish their numbers. They are like scorpions in the anguish which they inflict, for the sting of the scorpion is extremely painful, but seldom fatal; and their power to hurt is in their tails, perhaps to denote that they leave many deleterious consequences behind them. The 'five months' during which they continue contain an evident allusion to what orientals call 'the five locust months,' i. e. from May to September inclusive; and we might understand that nothing more is intended, if it were not for the repetition of this statement, which seems to indicate that it must have some symbolical meaning. But this is a point which I cannot satisfactorily elucidate, and it presents an equal or greater difficulty in all other interpretations of the vision. If that which I have given be the true one, these five months must be equivalent to man's lifetime upon the earth, in confirmation of which it may be observed: (1) That human life is frequently reckoned by months apparently with reference to its brevity and changing phases:

> The number of his months is with thee,
> And thou hast appointed his bounds (Job. xiv. 5).
> The number of his months is cut off in the midst (xxi. 21).

(2) Both Lange and Bengel, two of the most eminent commentators, with interpretations of the vision entirely different from the one here given, and from each other, agree substantially with this interpretation of the five months; for the former tells us that the number five has the symbolical meaning of 'life moved by spirit'; and the latter, that these five

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months represent about seventy-six years; but upon what evidence, in either case, I do not know. I think it probable that there was formerly a symbolical meaning attached to the number five, and to months, with which we are not acquainted, such that five months would represent the normal length of human life. However that may be, it is certain that the difficulty is equally great in every other interpretation of the vision.

12 The first woe is past; behold, there come two woes hereafter.

Thus closes the vision of the fifth trumpet. But the order of time here is not that in which these woes come upon the earth, but that in which the visions pass before the eyes of the Seer (179).

That which stands out in all this symbolization, and which is properly a disclosure under the seventh seal, opening out into these trumpet visions (163), is, that the torments of human life, all its maladies and sorrows, are truly the judgments of God; that they originate in sin from the power of Satan, who, as the angel of the abyss, as Abaddon and Apollyon, lets them loose from his place of torment, to scourge the sinful world; and it is because this truth is mostly lost sight of by mankind, who suffer these torments, indeed, but who see only the second causes which produce them, and do not connect them with their sins, that it is here disclosed by the opening of one of the seals of the seven-sealed book (137). Nor need we be surprised at the strength and gloom of these symbols; for what colors are dark enough to portray the vast world of human suffering as it lies under the eye of God's omniscience! What locust swarms of bodily and mental diseases, and how indescribable their torments! All the sicknesses and woes caused by the abuse of intoxicants, especially alcohol and opium; by licentiousness, luxury, and idleness; by passionate struggles for wealth; by its loss after it has been possessed and enjoyed, and by abject poverty; all the sorrows of disappointed ambition, affection, and hope; of infidelity in marriage, and disobedient children! What wonder that, under this intolerable load of misery, the suffer-

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ers should often be driven to despair, and should long for death, in the vain hope that it will end their sorrows! But the relief of death flies from them, for even the suicide does not find what he seeks. And how blessed that the seal of the living God turns all these calamities and sorrows into means of grace and salvation, so that the sealed, instead of being harmed by them, are purified, and prepared for the glories and the joys of heaven!

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XXI

THE SIXTH TRUMPET THE JUDGMENT OF SUDDEN AND VIOLENT DEATH IX 13–21

Here again the commentators are no less incongruous and self-contradictory than in the last case (182); for they interpret the horses and horsemen of this vision as representing pagans, Turks, Saracens, pashas with horse-tails on their helmets, kings, popes, inquisitors, heresies, and even the Holy Scriptures. Yet I venture again to suggest that the vision has a plain meaning, namely, that, as the preceding one represents the torments and miseries of mankind during life, with special reference to diseases and maladies, so here we have no less vividly symbolized the judgment of sudden and violent death, with a like special reference to one predominant cause of it, by which, as in the former case, the whole symbol is interpreted.

13 And the sixth angel sounded his trumpet: and I heard one voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14 saying unto the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Loose the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates: 15 and the four angels were loosed, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, that they should slay a third part of the people.

This golden altar is the altar of prayer (165), from which we have seen the fire of divine justice taken and cast upon the earth (167); and its four horns represent the power of the prayers of all the saints throughout the world; the number four being the symbol of the world or universality (114), and the horn everywhere, that of power (121), as in the words:

> **He had horns coming out of His hand,**
> **And there was the hiding of His power (Hab. iii. 4).**

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Hence the 'one voice' from the four horns of this altar is that of the united prayers of all God's people, the great burden of which, as we have seen, is, that His kingdom may come: but since this cannot be but by means of great judgments upon the world (169), the power of these prayers is here symbolically represented as a voice of command from the four horns of this altar, addressed to the trumpeting angel, to let loose the destructive forces which are to be employed in these judgments. For these angels whom He liberates, like those whom we have seen holding the winds in their hands (152), are symbolical representations of the divine agencies and ministries in the destructive forces of nature (153); and there are four of them to denote that their control applies to these forces in their totality (114) They are represented as bound and kept in readiness 'for the hour and day and month and year,' i. e. for all times in which their ministry shall be required, to signify that they are not allowed to exercise their powers of destruction until this is rendered necessary by the entrance of sin into the world, and perhaps that these powers could not have their utmost efficiency until the most effective instruments for the destruction of human life should be brought into use. But why are they represented as bound at the great river Euphrates? Here we must remember that this river was the typical boundary between the Lord's kingdom and the regions which represented the kingdom of Satan, as in the statements: "The Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. xv. 18).

> He shall have dominion also from sea to sea,
> And from the River [Euphrates] to the ends of the earth (Ps. lxxii. 8).

The unknown countries to the north and east of this river were the dwelling places of Gog and Magog, who were destined to destruction in the final consummation (Rev. xx. 8–9). Hence these angels of destruction are represented as bound on the border line between the Lord's kingdom and that department of the spirit world which is never to be reclaimed

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by divine grace, i. e. the realm of Satan; in other words, this border line they are not allowed to cross, until the set time for which they are prepared. As the swarm of human torments, in the preceding vision, are imprisoned in the abyss until they are liberated to do their appointed work, so these destroyers of human life are not permitted to cross the border line of Satan's kingdom where they originate, until the times when they shall be called forth to punish sin and wickedness: in other words, the causes which suddenly and violently destroy human life belong essentially to the realm of Satan in the sense that their fatal operations are the fruits, consequences, and punishments of sin; for they originate from the disordered relations between man and nature, and between man and man, which sin produces; apart from which they could never have had any more place or agency in this world than they have in heaven (183). Perhaps also it is not without significance, that Babylon, the great antichristian world power, was seated on the Euphrates, as an indication that these destructive agencies derive their greatest efficiency from the prevalence of antichristian worldliness.

16 And the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice ten thousand times ten thousand: I heard the number of them.

The symbolical angels of destruction are now lost sight of, or rather they seem to be inseparably blended with the demon host which is presented to the eye of the Seer. It contains such multitudes that he cannot count them, but he hears their number, 200,000,000, to denote that the causes of sudden and violent death are practically innumerable (180). They have a military character as horsemen or cavalry, in which, however, the riders are completely identified with the horses, to denote that their attacks are rapid and unavoidable (129); also, in pointed allusion to war, as the greatest of all the sudden and violent destroyers of human life.

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17 And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat upon them, having breastplates as of fire and jacinth and brimstone: and the heads of the horses are as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths goeth forth fire and smoke and brimstone.

The origin and nature of these destructive agencies are still further declared by these demon modifications; but otherwise the ideas which they represent are not clear. The horsemen have breastplates like fire and jacinth and brimstone, three things which seem to be introduced here with reference to their colors. The jacinth or hyacinth is a stone of various hues, and here probably of a dark or blood red, which, blending with those of fire and brimstone, would give to these breastplates a very lurid and terrible appearance. The breastplates themselves, as defensive armor, represent, as in the case of the locusts that could not be wounded (185), the security with which these demon powers perform their functions; for nothing is more remarkable than the inefficiency of all human efforts and skill to guard against the sudden and violent destruction of life. The heads of the horses are like those of lions, to denote the remorseless crushing destructiveness of these forces (185). Fire and smoke and brimstone issue forth out of their mouths (170); i. e. they are the instruments of divine justice, and punish sin with the torment of a painful death (183). Moreover, it is in this particular, taken in connection with the military character of the whole symbol, that I find the special allusion which gives us the key to its meaning. But here we must bear in mind that the Seer describes it just as he saw it in the vision, and much of its significance may relate to what was then in the distant future; also, from its military character in general, we naturally expect to find in it some allusion to the destructive agencies and instrumentalities of war, by which the greatest number of sudden and violent deaths are inflicted. Now, of all these instrumentalities, what is there so destructive, or which could be so fitly symbolized under these terrific images of fire and smoke and brimstone issuing out of the mouths of these demon horses, as gun-

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powder and firearms? And this interpretation, unlike many that I have given, is supported by some of the most eminent and judicious commentators, who hold quite other views of the general import of the vision, one of whom makes the following observation: "This is just such a description as would be given of an army to which the use of gunpowder was known. . . Looking . . upon a body of cavalry in the heat of an engagement, it would seem, if the cause were unknown, that the horses belched forth smoke and sulphurous flame." It was thus the symbol was presented to the eye of the Seer. He does not tell us what it means: perhaps he himself did not know, for it may have been impossible for any one to understand it in this particular until firearms should have come into use: and the fact, that these angels of destruction are represented as bound for a time, and not allowed to let loose their forces until the set time for which they are prepared, may contain an allusion to the comparatively late invention of gunpowder. In fine, that there is such a special reference to this predominant cause of the destruction of human life is the more probable from the fact, that there is a similar reference, as we have seen, to diseases and maladies among the causes of torment and misery (183).

18 By these three plagues a third part of the people were slain, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which went forth out of their mouths: 19 for the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like unto serpents, having heads, and with these they do hurt.

The number of those who are killed by all these causes, to represent which in their totality war, on account of its superior destructiveness, seems to be taken here, can hardly be less than a third part of mankind. This last modification in the form and action of these demon horses, namely, that they have tails with heads like serpents, with which they do hurt, may be intended to symbolize the terrible consequences which follow in the train of war (185), and other causes of the sudden and violent destruction of human life, and which do more hurt perhaps than the bloodiest battles.

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Here, then, we have the apocalyptic symbol of the judgment and mystery of sudden and violent death; the immediate causes of which are represented as a mighty host which the Seer cannot number because they are practically innumerable, including wars, explosions of steam and fire-damp, shipwrecks, railroad disasters, earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, murder, suicide, and the ravages of wild beasts. The general military character of the symbol gives predominance among these causes to war; and in its centre we behold the destruction caused by gunpowder and firearms. They are symbolized by demons from the realm of Satan, to denote that they originate from the spiritual world of moral evil; that they are permitted to do their work in consequence of sin, upon which they are the judgments of God, in fulfilment of His word:

> Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days (Ps. lv. 23).
> He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck
> Shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy (Prov. xxix. 1).

They come upon mankind under a mandate from the four horns of the altar of prayer, because the Lord finds it necessary to use them in subduing the world unto Himself in answer to the prayers of His people, that His kingdom may come (169): in all which we have nothing inconsistent with prayer that we may be delivered from sudden death, or from other judgments; for it is in answer to such prayer that they have no power to harm any who have the seal of God on their foreheads (184).

20 And the rest of the people who were not slain by these plagues repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils and images of gold and silver and brass and stone and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; 21 and they repented not of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

Thus we have represented the amazing impenitence of mankind under this judgment, by which one-third of them, i. e. a very large proportion, are cut off, and under the preceding one, by which they are overwhelmed in perpetual

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misery. They persist in their idolatries and immoralities, for which they are so grievously punished. They continue to worship devils or demons, and to be governed by Satanic influences; to set their hope, not in God, in the keeping of His commandments, in the blessings of His kingdom, but in images or idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk; i. e. in the things that perish in the using. They repent not of their idolatries and crimes; which, including sorcery, i. e. collusion, or attempted collusion, with evil spirits for selfish or injurious purposes, continue even yet to defile and corrupt society. How very few are led to repentance by the abounding miseries, or by the enormous destruction of life, which prevail in the world! How little influence the blood shed in our late civil war has had to lead the survivors to repentance! Hence it is to be feared that this impenitent hardness will make it necessary for the Lord to send upon us other and still greater judgments, before we shall be taught that we cannot thus harden our hearts, nor refuse to acknowledge and serve Him, both as individuals and as a nation, without being destroyed suddenly and without remedy. For the inflictions hitherto represented in these visions, not being sufficient to accomplish their benevolent objects, must needs be followed by others yet more severe, before the kingdom can be fully established, and the Golden City shall come down from God out of heaven. Meanwhile the sealed and numbered shall be kept in perfect safety; for whatever they may be called to suffer, whether from protracted misery or sudden death, shall be made 'to work for them more and more an exceeding weight of glory' (2 Cor. iv. 17).

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XXII

THE SEVEN THUNDERS SECRET THINGS BELONG UNTO THE LORD X 1–7

This vision is regarded by some as 'Episodical,' i. e. as interjected between the sixth and seventh trumpets; but it seems much better to take it as a continuation of the sixth in preparation for the last. But what is very remarkable is, that it contains in its bosom one whole series of the revelations of this book, that of the seven thunders. Yet the reason for this peculiar arrangement is quite obvious, namely, that the Seer was forbidden to make any record of the particulars of this series, in consequence of which it occupies but a single sentence. If he had been allowed to record and publish what the thunders revealed, this division of the book, no doubt, would have taken up as much room as any other one of the seven (14): but, since these hidden things could be dispatched with such brevity, they are here included under the sixth trumpet in preparation for the seventh and last.

1 And I saw another mighty angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud, and a rainbow was upon his head, and his countenance was as the sun, and his feet were as pillars of fire.

The Seer has not now his standpoint in heaven where it seems to have been ever since he obeyed the command, 'Come up hither' (108), but upon the earth, as is evident from his seeing this angel 'coming down out of heaven,' and from his hearing a voice subsequently 'from heaven.' The angel whom he now sees is called 'another mighty angel' perhaps with reference to the one whom he saw and heard proclaiming with a great voice, 'Who is worthy to open the

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book?' In both cases their great might is in order that their voices may be loud enough to be heard throughout the universe (119). The glory of this angel is very great, such indeed, that he is commonly taken to be the Lord in person; in which view, however, I cannot concur for reasons which have been given in a former similar case; yet we need not hesitate to regard him as a symbolical representative of the Lord, as in that case (166). For he is clothed with a cloud, probably a bright luminous one, like that which overshadowed the Lord on the mount of transfiguration (Mat. xvii. 5). A rainbow, literally 'the rainbow,' is upon his head, which is the symbol of God's covenant mercy, of which the Lord is the minister (110). His countenance is as the sun, which has been directly applied to the Lord Himself (38); and his feet are as pillars of fire, as we have seen the Lord's feet 'like burnished brass, as glowing in a furnace' (35). Other similar traits, identifying this glorious angel as at least a symbolical representative of the Lord, will appear in the sequel.

2 And he had in his hand a little book opened. And he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left upon the earth, 3 and cried with a great voice as a lion roareth; and when he cried, seven thunders spake [with] their voices.

This little opened book will require particular consideration hereafter. The angel sets one foot upon the earth, as representing the earthly or natural life of man in general (153), and the other upon the sea, the symbol of national life in particular (174), to denote the absolute authority over both of Him whom he represents, and that what he has to announce concerns all mankind. His voice is compared to the roaring of the lion, which, in his native wilds, has a massiveness, as it were, a solidity, resulting from the prodigious strength of his vocal organism, which has no rival except the thunder, with which it often mingles. Whether this great cry of the angel was inarticulate, like the roar of the lion, we are not informed; but if he said anything at this time, it is hidden from us, as in the case of what was said by the

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thunders. For they certainly 'spake' articulately and intelligibly, and with such fulness that their deliverances constitute one whole series of these revelations, co-ordinate with those of the seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven last plagues; and that they were understood by St. John is evident from what immediately follows.

4 And when the seven thunders spake, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven, saying, Seal up those things which the seven thunders spake, and write them not.

For what reason was this prohibition given? The question does not admit of a perfectly satisfactory answer, which would require at least that we should know what the thunders revealed. Yet we are not left altogether in the dark; for we know that it lies in the methods of divine providence and grace to disclose to chosen and prepared souls what must be concealed from all others; of which we have many Scriptural examples, and it is a matter of Christian experience. Thus Moses was admitted to behold the glory of God, and to talk with Him 'face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend' (Ex. xxxiii. 11); and when he came down from the mount of such open communion with God, his face did shine with reflected glory, so that the people could not look upon it, and he had to cover it with a veil (xxxiv. 33–35): how much less, then, could they have looked upon that glory itself, as it blazed in the face of God! The prophet Daniel received revelations which he was not allowed to publish, but was commanded to seal them up until the time of the end (Dan. xii. 4–9). . . Our Lord permitted only three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, to behold His glory on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. xvii. 1); and He said to them all: "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John xvi. 12): St. Paul also was caught up into heaven, and shown many things which he was not allowed to declare (2 Cor. xii. 2–4). Hence it is altogether probable that St. John was commanded to 'seal up,' i. e. to make no record of, what these thunders 'spake,' because the glory of

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it was greater than the church could bear. For if it had been published whilst as yet the Lord's people were not duly prepared for it, it would have done harm, such as would have befallen Israel in the wilderness if they had been permitted to see what Moses saw, and the disciples, if the Lord had revealed to them what they could not bear. Thus we are instructed that, if we would be admitted to the secrets of God, we must become beloved disciples.

Notwithstanding, although the particulars of what was here revealed to the holy apostle are hidden from us, yet the circumstances in which it was communicated are so carefully described as to indicate perhaps something of its general character. Hence it has been plausibly conjectured that these thunders revealed a stage of great spiritual progress and prosperity in the church, such as presented a strong contrast to the judgments and woes of the preceding seals and trumpets, and to the seven chalices of wrath that are to follow in the order of the visions. This conjecture rests mainly on two considerations: (1) The benign glory of the angel who announces the thunders: the sunlight of his countenance, the luminous cloud with which he is clothed, the rainbow upon his head, the splendor of his feet: all which are symbols of grace, mercy, peace, and blessing, and not of judgments or punishments: (2) The benign significance of thunder in many passages of Scripture, such as the following:

> The waters stood above the mountains;
> At thy rebuke they fled;
> At the voice of thy thunder they hasted away (Ps. civ. 6–7).
> Thou calledst in trouble, and I delivered thee;
> I answered thee in the secret places of thunder (lxxxi. 7).

Also, at our Lord's baptism, there came a voice from heaven, probably in thunder tones, saying, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him' (Mat. iii. 17); and the same at His transfiguration. Moreover, when He prayed, 'Father, glorify thy name' (xvii. 5), there came a voice of thunder from heaven, saying, 'I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again' (John xii. 27–29). Finally He gave the name, 'sons of thunder' (Mark iii. 17) to James and John apparently

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on account of their great power in preaching the gospel. From such indications as these we may gather that the general import of these thunders was of a benign and gracious character: perhaps great revivals in the church, and great successes in her evangelizing and missionary work; perhaps the translation of the Scriptures into all languages, and their distribution among all nations; perhaps Ethiopia stretching forth her hands unto God; the Christianizing of England, France, Holland, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Russia, America, the Sandwich Islands, Tahita, Madagascar, New Zealand; and other triumphs of the gospel yet to come, more extensive and more glorious than any that have ever been known. Indeed, what seems most probable to me is, that these thunders revealed to St. John for his great consolation the glories of the Lord's millennial reign; for, as we shall see hereafter, a similar reticence is observed with respect to its particulars, where we should naturally expect the most ample details and the most glowing word-pictures (Rev. xx. 1–6). Hence the joyful haste with which he was about to write and publish what he had heard, when he was prohibited by the voice from heaven. Yet it must be acknowledged that all such conjectures are uncertain; for the appearance of the angel may be otherwise understood, and thunder has not always a gracious significance.

5 And the angel whom I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his right hand to heaven, 6 and sware by Him who liveth forever and ever, who created heaven and the things that are therein, and the earth and the things that are therein, and the sea and the things that are therein, that time should be no longer: 7 but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he must sound his trumpet, then the mystery of God should be accomplished, as He declared the glad tidings to His servants the prophets.

This glorious angel, standing upon the sea and upon the earth, raising his right hand to heaven, and taking a solemn oath by Him who created all things, offers to the universe a spectacle of almost unapproachable sublimity. The transaction is an ample justification of solemn oaths on proper occasions; and it gives us the Scriptural form in which they

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ought always to be taken, i. e. by raising the right hand to heaven, and not by kissing the Bible. The import of this oath is, that the course of time with respect to earthly things is about to come to an end; that during the period designated as 'the days of the voice of the seventh angel,' 'the mystery of God,' i. e. the mysterious course of His providence as connected with this world, should be accomplished. Hence we shall find that all the subsequent visions up to the close go forth from the sounding of this seventh trumpet, and are thus included under it, just as the trumpets themselves go forth from the seventh seal (163). Thus we see that this last trumpet includes a period of time, which makes it plain that what St. Paul says concerning it must be understood of its close: "Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. . . . Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory (40). O Death, where is thy sting? O Hades, where is thy victory?" (1 Cor. xv. 51–56). The joyfulness of this crowning result is beautifully anticipated in the closing words of this vision (133), 'as He declared the glad tidings to His servants the prophets,' for the word here is the same that is commonly rendered to preach the gospel.

1. The fact, that the Apocalyptist was forbidden to record what the seven thunders revealed to him, seems to imply an additional reason why the disclosures of this book are made in symbolical representations (5–9), which cannot be understood to edification without much study and prayer: for it may be that, without such preparation, if they could be understood at all, they would do harm rather than good (197). It is true that no part of the word of God can be profitable to careless or prayerless souls, yet this may be true in an eminent sense of the mysterious truths here symbolized; and this may be the reason why so many find in them, as also in the other Scriptures, little or no interest or spiritual quickening; and why, to those who diligently and prayerfully study them,

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they have a never failing, ever increasing freshness and vitality, as the bread and the water of life to satisfy the hunger and thirst of their souls.

2. There is a pregnant meaning for us all in the frequent reference to the end of the world which runs through this book and, indeed, throughout the Scriptures. Here it is in the form of a great oath by this glorious angel, who represents, in some sort, the Lord Himself, 'that time shall be no longer.' And death, which is the end of our time, is constantly occurring, and may come to us at any moment. This is, indeed, a truism, yet it is one that can never lose its tremendous significance, though commonly it is so little regarded. How soon the great oath of this angel may be fulfilled in our experience, we cannot tell. Are we ready for it? That is for us the question of all questions, which here presses upon us, and clamors for an answer. For this end of time to those whom it shall find unprepared for it will be no less terrible than it will be joyful to those whom it shall find prepared and waiting for their Lord's coming and the end of the world, 'as He declared the glad tidings to His servants the prophets.'

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XXIII

THE LITTLE BOOK OF THE END THE SWEETNESS AND BITTERNESS OF PROPHECY X 8–11

This vision is a continuation of the last, and is best comprehended under the sixth trumpet in further preparation for the seventh (195). Here, however, it may be well to recall what has been previously observed, namely, that there is a certain cyclical movement in these successive series of revelations, such that each of them, except the last, covers a great part of the current dispensation (14). Yet in each succeeding one there is a certain advance beyond the preceding; that is to say, there is an ever increasing effulgence of the divine glory, which bursts forth in all its splendors from the Golden City, 'descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God' (Rev. xxi. 11). Moreover, the several series, as they advance, dwell more and more on the things that are nearest to the end, so that we feel ourselves borne irresistibly onwards to the closing scene. Hence the appearance here of this glorious angel announcing the end of time: and now also the Seer informs us how he was commissioned to prophesy more fully and particularly concerning the end, and to tell us what should take place 'in the days of the voice of the seventh angel . . when the mystery of God should be accomplished' (199). In what follows, as, indeed, throughout the book, there is nothing elsewhere that can be compared with the graphic vividness of the word-painting.

8 And the voice which I heard from heaven, [I heard it] again speaking with me, and saying, Go take the book which is opened in the hand of the angel who standeth upon the sea and upon the earth.

This voice from heaven he has heard three times before: (1) when it called him to receive these apocalyptic visions

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(28); (2) when it commanded him to come up into heaven (108), that he might see all things from the heavenly point of view; (3) when it forbade him to write what the seven thunders revealed (197); (4) and now he hears it again commanding him to go and take the little book out of the angel's hand. In none of these instances, nor in several that will follow, are we informed whose voice it was; wherein it conforms to that which spoke from heaven at the baptism, transfiguration, and agony of the Lord (198): but on all these occasions it evidently represented the authority, and probably the person, of God the Father. In the first two instances, it called the Seer to receive and publish what should be revealed to him, and now it commissions him for a similar ministry concerning the revelations that are to follow. These are represented as contained in a book brought down from heaven by the angel who announces the end, to denote that they are from God, and that they pertain to the consummation of His purposes and providence. The book is 'opened,' to signify that it is, in some sort, a part of the seven-sealed one which has been already opened by the Lamb (122); and accordingly we shall see that its contents are chiefly a more particular disclosure of what, in the cyclical movement of the successive visions, has been touched upon before, especially at the opening of the sixth seal (149). It is a 'little' book, this point being emphasized by several repetitions, to signify that it contains but a small part of what was written in the great book with the seven seals, and that comparatively little remains to be disclosed, though its particulars may occupy a large space, before the mystery shall be accomplished. For what purpose the Seer is now commanded to go and take this book out of the hand of the angel we shall immediately see.

9 And I went unto the angel, saying unto him that he should give me the little book: and he saith unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but in thy mouth it shall be sweet as honey.

The word of God is often represented under the image of

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bread, to signify that it is the bread of life, the food of the soul: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat. iv. 4). In fact, this image is as old as the time of Moses, from whom our Lord quotes it. Also the sweetness of this spiritual food is often symbolized by that of honey:

> How sweet are thy words to my taste!
> Than honey to my mouth (Ps. cxix. 3).

Hence the prophets often speak of eating God's words, to signify the receiving and appropriating of them by their spiritual faculties, as in the following passages: "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy words were unto me a joy and the rejoicing of my heart (Jer. xv. 16). Thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee . . open thy mouth and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, a hand was put forth unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was in it; and He spread it before me; and it was written within and without; and there were written therein lamentations and mourning and woe. And He said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat the roll. And He said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then I did eat it, and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness" (Ez. ii. 8–9; iii. 1–3). These striking images have the same meaning here, namely, that our Seer received and appropriated the revelations contained in this little book, so that he could record and publish them just as they were communicated. And they were as honey to his taste, not only as being the word of God, but also because they were apocalyptic disclosures of future events in the history of the church and the world. For we have seen how grievously he was disappointed, and 'wept much' when, after he had been promised such disclosures, no one was found able to open the seven-sealed book, and was not comforted until one of the throned elders assured him that the Lion of the tribe of Judah had prevailed to loose its seals (119). Such is the

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intense desire of the human heart to penetrate the secrets of futurity, even where, as in this case, it is chastened by faith and submission to the divine wisdom: and the surpassing sweetness of such disclosures is evinced by nothing more, perhaps, than by the almost innumerable books that have been written, some of them by the greatest and most saintly men, to understand and impart to others the mysteries of the future which the Apocalypse unveils. Certainly, then, it is no sign of intelligence, nor of any deep interest in spiritual things, that it is so generally regarded as still a sealed book.

But why, we must now enquire, did the Seer experience such bitterness after he had inwardly digested the revelations of this little book of the end? Why did they not continue to be sweet and joyful to his heart? Doubtless it was because they contained the gloomiest pictures of sin, judgment, and woe. For now he sees, what hitherto has not been shown him in such amplitude of particulars, those judgments and sufferings which must yet be experienced before his Lord's kingdom can be finally established, and which cause him the bitterest disappointment and most poignant anguish. Having just heard what the seven thunders spake, and been filled with what seems to have been their glowing revelations of the future prosperity and glory of the church, he naturally supposes he has reached the end of painful disclosures, and that henceforth he shall have a smooth sea and favoring gales; that his delightful duty will be to record the fulfilment of the Lord's blessed promises; that there will be in future a steady progress and an ever increasing effulgence of grace and glory up to the final establishment of the kingdom, and even to the close of the dispensation. He has not foreseen the slaughter of God's two witnesses by a beast out of the abyss, nor the two beasts out of the sea and the earth, clothed with all the power of the great red dragon, causing all the world to worship them, nor the seven last plagues, nor the harlotry nor the judgments of great Babylon. Least of all can he have foreseen that Satan, after having been chained and shut up in the abyss for a thousand years,

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will be loosed again, and go out to deceive the nations. But all these fearful revelations he now finds in this little book of the end: no wonder, then, that they fill his heart with the bitterest disappointment and sorrow. Yet it is only thus that he can be duly prepared to prophesy concerning them.

11 And they say unto me, Thou must prophesy again concerning peoples and nations and tongues and kings many.

There is some uncertainty here as to the text, for while the best manuscripts have 'they say,' there are other good ones in which we find 'he saith.' If this latter be correct, it refers to the angel from whom the Seer receives the little book; if the former, it may include the angel and the voice from heaven, both telling him that he must prophesy again; or, which is more probable, it may be taken indefinitely in the sense that it was said to him. The variation, however, is of little importance, for in any case he must now take up his burden again, and with deepest sorrow for the sins and sufferings of his fellow man must declare and publish what he finds written in the book, and must faithfully report the visions of judgment with which its contents are to be unfolded and emphasized: prophecies 'concerning peoples and nations and tongues and kings many,' in which form of expressions we have an indication that nations and secular governments are now to be dealt with by 'the King of kings and Lord of lords' (Rev. xix. 16), and perhaps of the more historical character of the following visions.

Such is the plain meaning of these apocalyptic symbols, in further illustration of which we should observe, that this sorrow which St. John experienced seems to be inseparable from the gift of prophecy, and from deep insight into the nature and consequences of sin. All the preceding prophets complained of it, often in the most pathetic expressions. For notwithstanding the glories and beatitudes of the coming kingdom concerning which they prophesied, the sins and judgments and sufferings through which the world must pass before it could be finally established always filled their

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hearts with unutterable anguish, which colored with its own sombre hues their glowing anticipations. It is true, they saw with all clearness that these judgments and woes were the necessary consequences of sin and rebellion against God, but this, instead of mitigating, only increased their sorrow, as expressed with the deepest pathos in many such passages as the following:

> My tears have been my meat day and night,
> While they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? (Ps. xlii. 3).
> Rivers of water run down mine eyes,
> Because they keep not thy law (cxix. 136).
> Oh that my head were waters,
> And mine eyes a fountain of tears,
> That I might weep day and night
> For the slain of the daughter of my people! (Jer. ix. 1).

This doubtless was one reason why they called their messages burdens: "The burden of Egypt . . . The burden of Moab . . . The burden of Tyre . . . The burden of Nineveh . . . The burden of Babylon" (Is. xix. 1), and many others. Even God Himself is represented as bearing this burden of sorrow:

> Oh that thou hadst hearkened unto my commandments;
> Then had thy peace been as a river,
> And thy righteousness as the waves of the sea (Is. xlviii. 18).

Thus also the Lord wept over Jerusalem: "And when He was come near He beheld the city and wept over it, saying, Oh that thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace: but now they are hid from thine eyes (Luke xix. 41). O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: for I say unto you, ye shall not see me henceforth till ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mat. xxiii. 37–39).

And we ourselves, although the study of prophecy does not make us prophets, yet, while we ponder their messages,

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cannot fail to take upon ourselves some portion of their burden, nor to be touched with their sorrow. For notwithstanding the certainty and glory of the crowning result, which in anticipation is a well-spring of joy to all believing souls, yet the sins and judgments of mankind through which it must be reached at last are a grievous burden, too heavy indeed for us to bear in our own strength. Fain would we have it otherwise. Glad indeed should we be if the Lord's people could attain to their white robes, their crowns and palms, without passing through 'the great tribulation' (160). But so it cannot be, either for the individual soul, or the redeemed race. For it is only through plagues of wild beasts, war, pestilence, and famine; through earthquakes, volcanoes, tornadoes, falling stars, and darkened suns; through conflagrations, shipwrecks, railway disasters, explosions, sicknesses, and death; through seas of martyr blood, and the judgments by which it must be avenged; through times of general apostasy, when the corpses of God's witnesses lie unburied in the streets of the great city of this world; through the sorceries, adulteries, and judgments of great Babylon; through the seven plagues poured out upon mankind from the seven golden chalices of the wrath of God; through the final rebellion of the nations deceived by Satan loosed from his chains: it is only through such experiences as these that the earth shall be finally delivered from the primeval curse; that the white-robed people shall enter into the Golden City, and take up their everlasting abode upon the banks of the river of the water of life, which flows forth out of the throne of God and the Lamb, and shall eat of the fruit of the tree of life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Ah, how different is all this from what we should have anticipated! How gladly would we have had it otherwise! For to us it would seem that the Lord's kingdom should have gone steadily onwards from the first, ever increasing in extent, power, and glory, until the promises should all be fulfilled. 'But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor His ways our ways' (Is. lxv. 8). What a fearful reaction followed the first brilliant successes of the Gospel!

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What an apostasy in the Roman church ; what corruption in the Greek ! What a crying necessity for the Reformation of the sixteenth century! Of all this, indeed, the history has been written, and it now causes us little or no surprise. But the disappointment of the boundless hopes of that Reformation through the baleful sectarianism developed out of it, and the hardly less need of another to restore the catholic unity of the church, for which the Lord so earnestly prayed in order 'that the world might believe' (John xvii. 23): the history of all this has yet to be written, when the enormous evil of our sectarianism shall have come to be recognized.

Thus has it ever been, and thus, as we are instructed by all the prophets, will it continue to be till the end ; for even the millennium will be followed by a period of apostasy and judgment. And what does it all mean, but the measureless depth and darkness and horror of sin, the malignity of man's rebellion against God? It was this that crucified the Lord of glory, and shed the blood of the martyrs. Hence the Romish and Greek corruptions and Protestant sectarianism. It is this which has brought, and will continue to bring, such fearful judgments upon the nations, because nothing else can subdue their obstinate rebellion against their true and lawful Sovereign. It is an infinite sorrow. How gladly would we have it otherwise ! But in all this turmoil of guilt and punishment not one of the Lord's trusting people shall be left to perish, having the seal of His covenant on their foreheads (157); that is, the Holy Spirit of promise in their souls. For all others 'there remains only a certain looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall destroy the adversaries' (Heb. x. 27). And thus the evil that is in the world shall at last come to an end, for without this no prophecy closes.

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XXIV

THE TEMPLE MEASURED THE COURT OF THE GENTILES CAST OUT THE SAFETY OF THE TRUE CHURCH NOMINAL CHRISTIANS REJECTED XI 1–2

This vision also is best comprehended under the sixth trumpet in still further preparation for the seventh. It is closely connected with that of the sealing of the cxliv thousand representing in part the same idea (154), i. e. the safety of the people of God amidst the judgments falling upon the guilty world. But here this idea is strongly contrasted, as it is not there, with the state of mere nominal Christians, who in this life are associated with believers.

1 And there was given unto me a reed like unto a rod, saying, Arise, and measure the temple of God and the altar and them that worship therein.

In the English Bible we have the words, 'and the angel stood saying,' but there is no 'angel' in the best manuscripts. No doubt, this word was introduced by some copyist to supply a grammatical subject for 'saying,' where the author chose to leave it unexpressed on account of the indefiniteness of the preceding statement as to who gave him the reed. This he does not tell us, nor by whom the command was given, but evidently he means us to understand that it was all by divine authority. This reed was simply a measuring instrument, but it was 'like unto a rod' with a deep significance: for the rod was the instrument with which land was measured or surveyed for the purpose of determining its ownership, and hence it became a symbol of secure possession, as in the following: "The rod of the wicked shall not rest upon the lot of the righteous (Ps. cxxv. 3). The rod of thine inheritance which thou hast redeemed, mount Zion, wherein thou

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hast dwelt (lxxiv. 2). Israel is the rod of His inheritance" (Jer. x. 16). Also, it is a Scriptural symbol of the power of the Lord: "The Lord will stretch forth the rod of thy strength out of Zion" (Ps. cx. 2), and of the strong consolations wherewith He comforts His people: "Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (xxiii. 4). The temple here, as elsewhere, is the symbol of the true church: "Ye are the temple of God. . . .The temple of the living God. . . . Which temple ye are" (95). This altar, by which is to be understood the golden altar of incense (165), symbolizes the life of prayer and worship which is ever a distinguishing trait of the Lord's people: and 'them that worship therein' is added as a literal interpretation of the symbols of the temple and the altar, just as 'distress of nations with perplexity' interpret the symbol of 'the sea and the waves roaring' (Luke xxi. 25). The importance attached to this symbol of measuring the temple appears from the fact, that the New Jerusalem is thus measured (Rev. xxi. 15–17), and also the temple in the visions of Ezekiel: "And, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like unto the appearance of brass, with . . a measuring reed. . . . So he measured the . . building . . . and the threshold of the gate . . and every little chamber . . and between the little chambers . . also the porch of the gate . . and the parts thereof . . and the breadth of the entry of the gate" (Ez. xl., xli., xlii.): and so on, with the utmost particularity, throughout the building. Hence it is clothed with great fulness of meaning. For as the accurate measuring of one's land implies the most perfect knowledge of its boundaries and extent with reference to its defence against all other claimants, so this measuring of the temple with 'a reed like unto a rod' represents the Lord's people as perfectly known to Him in the sharpest distinction between them and all others, as His peculiar inheritance which He will by no means suffer to be alienated, as His cherished possession which He will defend and protect against all invaders. In like manner, St. Paul prays for his fellow Christians, 'that they might know what was the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints' (Eph.

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i. 18). The leading idea is the perfect security of the people of God, as depending upon the perfection of His knowledge of them and of all their circumstances, and upon His purpose to hold them as His inalienable inheritance and possession.

But why, we must now enquire, since the safety of the righteous has been so fully represented before in the vision of numbering and sealing them, is it here exhibited again, and that under a symbol which differs so little from the preceding? This repetition seems to be grounded upon several reasons: (1) It may be intended to give additional emphasis to the idea, to keep it from being lost sight of even for a moment: (2) It is very necessary that the faith of God's people should be strongly confirmed in view of the subsequent disclosures, especially those of the next vision, in which we shall see the Lord's witnesses overcome and slain by a beast that rises out of the abyss: (3) But the principal reason is, no doubt, that in the preceding vision of numbering and sealing the servants of God there is only a general reference to the vast multitude of mere nominal Christians (158), who in every age have been more or less closely connected with the church, and partakers, to some extent at least, of the benefits of Christianity. What are we to understand concerning them? What is their true relation to the church? What is to become of them at last? These are the questions which are now to be considered; and all true as well as nominal Christians may well take knowledge of the answers which are here given.

2 And the court which is without the temple cast out, and it thou shalt not measure, for it was given unto the gentiles; and the holy city they shall tread forty and two months.

In the court which surrounded the temple at Jerusalem strangers, gentiles, heathen were allowed; but they were prohibited by inscriptions or placards on its walls and pillars from penetrating further into the sacred inclosure. Hence it was called the court of the gentiles, as it is here said to have been 'given unto' them: and they included all of every sort who, for any reason whatsoever, associated

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with the worshippers in the temple. Thus we see that, as the temple is the symbol of the true church or people of God, this court must be understood as representing mere nominal Christians: and the Seer is forbidden to measure it, and commanded to cast it out of his measurement, to signify that they do not belong to the Lord's measured, numbered, and sealed people, and have neither part nor lot in the great salvation. Yet they cannot be wholly separated from the church until the end of the world, as the tares cannot be separated from the wheat until the harvest (Mat. xiii. 28). Incidentally, therefore, they are partakers in this life of many of the benefits of the Christian religion. This is a boon which they enjoy from their association with Christians; and in this sense it is here said that the court was 'given' unto them.

In what follows there is a pointed reference to the words of the Lord: "Jerusalem shall be trodden of the gentiles, until the times of the gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke xxi. 24). For 'the holy city' surrounded the court of the gentiles as this court surrounded the temple; and since the gentiles were allowed in the court, much more were they free to inhabit the city. This is the primary sense of the words, 'the holy city shall they tread'; for the word here has the same meaning as in the prophet: "When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hands, to tread [i. e. frequent] my courts?" (Is. i. 12). It is true that our English Bible renders this word in the text 'tread under foot,' and in the Lord's prophecy, 'trodden down,' whilst in that of Isaiah the Revised Version gives us 'trample my courts.' But these are secondary meanings of the word, which the translators and revisers adopted as expressing what they understood by it, namely, the trampling down, profaning, devastating the courts of the temple and the holy city; which it certainly includes, yet only, as we shall see, in a subordinate manner. Its primary meaning is to tread, in the sense of frequent. Hence those who tread the holy city and to whom the outer court is given are those who attach themselves to the church, sometimes as members in full communion, but yet not true Christians, sometimes as habitual attendants and supporters

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of her worship, though not regular members, together with the multitudes who have no other connection with the church than that they inhabit Christian countries. For these enjoy many temporal benefits and blessings from the Christian religion, because the court of the gentiles has been given unto them, and they are allowed to tread the streets of the holy city. But the secondary meanings of this word, i. e. 'to tread down, under foot, trample,' are by no means to be left out of view; for doubtless it was intended to represent also that dominant influence of the world over the church which results from the closeness of her association with it, and which brings her into a state of bondage like that of Israel in Egypt and of the captives in Babylon. In this way the gentiles do indeed tread under foot the holy city. This idea has been previously indicated (68), and it will be copiously developed in subsequent visions. The time, 42 months, during which this state of things is to continue, is the same with the 1260 days and with the 'time, times, and a half time' (Rev. xii. 6, 14; xiii. 5), hereafter to be considered. Its beginning, length, and close have been much disputed, concerning which I have no more definite opinion to offer than that it seems to cover a great part or the whole of this dispensation, reaching even to the separation of the tares from the wheat (Mat. xiii. 30). Here it is measured by months, probably with reference to the changing phases of the moon (185), to denote that the church is subject to the unstable conditions of time and sense while she remains in such close connection with the world.

The class here represented as associated with, and exerting such a deleterious influence upon the church, has been more or less numerous at different times. Under the Old Testament dispensation it must have been very large, for the whole people of Israel were members of the church, and the history of those times is abundant evidence that a great proportion of them were anything but true believers. But when the Lord came into the world a great deal of this chaff was separated from the wheat, for none but sincere and prepared souls could be induced to accept a crucified Saviour. Hence it was said of Him at the time: "Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor, and will

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gather His wheat into His garner, but will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Mat. iii. 12). Yet among the apostles there was a Judas Iscariot, and in the church at Jerusalem there were Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, and, no doubt, other false professors. During the martyr age this class, for obvious reasons, must have been very small; but when Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire, it would naturally be immensely numerous; and at the present time the circumstances of the church render it probable that her membership includes multitudes who only frequent her outer court. Indeed, many are made to appear such by their falling away into gross immoralities, and, where this does not occur, by their manifest want of the Spirit of the Lord: "For if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His" (Rom. viii. 9). We have in every Christian congregation also a considerable number who do not confess Christ before men, nor keep His ordinances: and beyond all these is the great outlying mass of those who living in Christian countries have no other connection with the church. All these are here represented as 'cast out' of the Lord's spiritual inheritance. Not that church membership in form is regarded as essential to salvation; but it is essential that the souls of men should be members of the Lord's spiritual body, of which His church is the outward and visible sign; nor is there any excuse for those who fail to acknowledge Him before men in His own ordinances. For they have their lot in Christian countries, and many of them were born of Christian parents. For them, as for all others, Christ died, and they have the free offer of salvation. What less, then, can He require of them than that they should identify themselves heartily and openly with His cause; should confess Him as their Saviour by the believing observance of His holy ordinances? If they persist in refusing to Him this reasonable service, He assures them that He will not confess them before His Father in heaven, but will cast them out, saying, 'I never knew you' (Mat. vii. 22; x. 32). Let them be wise, therefore, whilst yet the door stands open through which they may enter, though late, into His holy temple.

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XXV

THE BEAST OUT OF THE ABYSS THE LORD'S TWO WITNESSES FAITH AND PRAYER XI 3–14

This vision, in some respects, is one of the most remarkable, and has commonly been regarded as one of the most difficult, in the book. For it represents the Lord as having two witnesses, who, therefore, must be eminently distinguished from all others; and these, as overcome and slain by a beast that ascends out of the abyss; which gives it a most lurid coloring of spiritual judgment, and calls forth our wonder and awe.

3 And I will give unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and sixty days clothed in sackcloth.

We are not informed who speaks these words, but it is sufficiently evident that He is the same who has just commanded to measure the temple (210). The word 'power,' as in the English Bible, is not in the text, but the meaning of this abrupt expression seems to be, I will permit and ordain that my two witnesses shall prophesy in sackcloth. They are two, as sharply distinguished from any other number; they are witnesses for God or the Lord Jesus Christ, and prophets in some eminent sense; and the time of their prophesying in sackcloth is 1260 days, the same as 42 months (214), which, as we have seen, is that of the pilgrimage of the church of the new dispensation through the wilderness of this world, bearing the cross, identified with the sufferings of her Saviour; during which she continues closely connected with, and, to a certain extent, in bondage to the world. Hence, i. e. on account of the low state of spiritual life, they prophesy in sackcloth. But who or what are these prophetic witnesses? Here again we have 'a Babel of interpretations' (188), for we are told that they are Enoch and Elijah,

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the law and the prophets, the law and the gospel, Jews and gentiles, priests and magistrates, church and state, the Old and New Testaments, preachers to the Jews, the whole line of witnesses for the truth, the Waldenses and Albigenses, the reformers of the sixteenth century, two persons who are to appear in the very last times, and still other persons and things. It would seem that every one has guessed at the meaning of the symbol as led by his own imagination, without any due regard to the interpretation which the Seer himself has given us in what immediately follows.

4 These are the two olive trees and the two light-bearers that stand before the Lord of the earth.

Here now we evidently have an explanatory reference to one of the apocalyptic visions of the prophet Zechariah, which in part is as follows: "And the angel . . said unto me, What seest thou? And I said, . . Behold, a light-bearer all of gold, with its bowl on the top of it, and its seven lamps thereon, and seven pipes to the lamps, . . and two olive trees beside it, one on the right side of the bowl, and the other on the left side thereof. And I answered and spake unto the angel that talked with me, saying, What are these, my Lord? . . Then he answered and spake unto me, saying, This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by an army nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. . . . Then I answered and said unto him, What are these two olive trees on the right side of the light-bearer and on the left side thereof? And . . what are these two olive branches, which, through the two golden spouts, empty the golden oil out of themselves? . . Then he said, These are the two sons of oil that stand by the Lord of the whole earth" (Zech. iv.). Now this elaborate symbol has always been understood as a representation of the spiritual life of the church, with special reference to its dependence upon the influences of the Holy Spirit, also to the means through which these influences are communicated, and to its light-giving power as thus nourished and perfected. For this seven-branched candelabrum, with its seven lamps, which stood in the sanctuary of the

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temple before the veil of the Holy of Holies, and a representation of which is still to be seen among the spoils of Jerusalem on the arch of Titus at Rome, is a well-recognized symbol of the light-giving life of the church; and the golden or precious oil with which its lamps were fed, as all interpreters agree, represented the influences of the Holy Spirit (102). Hence these two olive trees, 'sons of oil, that stand before the Lord of the earth,' with their two branches serving as pipes through which the oil is emptied into the bowl on the top of the light-bearer to feed the lamps, must stand for the means or instrumentalities through which the Spirit's influences are communicated to the church. Now our Seer, interpreting the symbol of the two witnesses, expressly tells us that they are these two olive trees: in other words, as I understand him, by due attention to the vision of the olive trees, we shall find this of the witnesses sufficiently interpreted; not that they correspond in all their particulars, for in the vision of Zechariah there is but one candelabrum, whilst in this of St. John there are two, but the leading ideas in both are the same. What, then, it only remains to enquire, are the two great means or instrumentalities through which the influences of the Holy Spirit are communicated to the church? To this question there can be, of course, but one answer, they are Faith and Prayer, for without these all other means are inefficacious. Hence these two witnesses, like the two olive trees, with their two connecting branches through which the golden oil was poured into the bowl of the candelabrum, are symbolical representations of Faith and Prayer, of which also they are vivid personifications. The principal difference between the two visions is that in one the life of the church is represented by two light-bearers, corresponding to Faith and Prayer, and, in the other, by one, corresponding to the Prayer of Faith. This interpretation will be made clearer and abundantly confirmed in what follows.

5 And if any one be minded to hurt them, fire goeth forth out of their mouth and devoureth their enemies; and if any one be minded to hurt them, thus he must be killed.

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Here there is another explanatory allusion, i. e. to the prophet Elijah, who by the word of his faith and prayer called down fire from heaven which consumed the bands of fifties that had been sent against him to put a stop to his prophesying and witness-bearing: the fire being said to go forth from his mouth because it came at his word (2 Ki. i. 9–12). This idea is further illustrated by what was said to another prophet: "Behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them" (Jer. v. 14). The repetition in the text is for emphasis, to express more forcibly the preciousness of Faith and Prayer to their Lord.

6 These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to smite the earth with every plague as often as they will.

Here are two other explanatory or interpreting allusions. The first is to the faith and prayer of Elijah, by the power of which he shut up the heavens, so that no rain fell upon the land of Israel, in fulfilment of his word to king Ahab: "As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain but according to my word" (1 Ki. xvii. 1); and here it is to be observed, that this is the most distinguished example of the prayer of faith that is given us in the New Testament, as where it is said: "The prayer of a righteous man is mighty in its working: Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are; and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and it rained not upon the earth for three years and six months; and he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit" (James v. 17–18). The second allusion is to Moses, by whose faith and prayer the plagues were brought upon Egypt, among which that of turning the water into blood was one of the most signal. Hence he is celebrated, along with Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, as one of the great heroes of faith (Heb. xi. 23–29); and in these visions we have seen that the sea is turned into blood in answer to the

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prayers of the saints (173). But why is it that plagues, rather than blessings, are here represented as coming upon the earth through faith and prayer? The reason has been given before (169), namely, because the burden of the prayers of the Lord's people is, that His kingdom may come, and these judgments are necessary to establish it. Yet why does He not rather subdue the world unto Himself by the power of His grace and love? But we might as well ask, why He did not deliver the earth from the wickedness of the old world without a flood; and Israel from the bondage in Egypt without the plagues; and America from the curse of slavery without the sacrifice of a million of lives? (170). The answer to all such questions is, that men will not have it so: "How often would I have gathered thy children together as a hen doth gather her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Mat. xxiii. 37). It is only in this way, in the employment of means indispensable to the establishment of the Lord's blessed kingdom, that Faith and Prayer 'have power to smite the earth with every curse as often as they will.'

7 And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that cometh up out of the abyss will make war upon them, and overcome them, and kill them.

In these words it is predicted that a time will come when Faith and Prayer will cease to bear their testimony, when they will hardly be found in the world; and probably there is an allusion here to that terrible prophecy by the Lord Himself: "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" (Luke xviii. 8). He does not say there will be none, but the question certainly implies that it will be extremely rare; and in this vision we have a large development of that idea. But who or what is this beast that comes up out of the abyss, makes war upon Faith and Prayer, overcomes, and slays them? Here, then, let it be observed, that all the bestial forms which fill so large a place in these visions represent one fundamental idea, that of opposition to the Lord and His kingdom, antichristianity, antichrist. They are beasts, literally wild beasts, beasts of prey, to de-

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note that this opposition is 'of the earth earthy,' essentially brutal, both in its utter incapacity of the knowledge of God and divine things, and in its remorseless cruelty and destructiveness; and this symbolism accords with the fact, that one of the four sore judgments of God is that of wild beasts (184). This one ascends out of the abyss, the realm of Satan, to signify that it has a specially malignant and diabolical character, as his agent, which is signally manifested also by its warfare upon the Lord's two witnesses, Faith and Prayer. These particular objects of its enmity, moreover, interpret its special significance, evincing that it is intended to symbolize scepticism, which denies the reality of the spiritual world, the object of faith, and scoffs at the efficacy of prayer. For the power here ascribed to these witnesses to the reality of the unseen world, the power to open and shut heaven, so that it shall rain, or not rain, is just that which modern scepticism most strenuously denies and ridicules. And its beastly nature is abundantly manifest in its gross materialism; in its teaching that men have no souls, or spiritual nature; that they are descended from ape-like animals, and are altogether as the brutes that perish. Hence what is here prophesied is, that the time will come when Faith and Prayer will no longer possess the powers with which they were originally endowed and undeniably exercised; when they will be so enfeebled by this materialistic scepticism as to be little more than empty forms, or 'corpses': all which will more fully appear in what follows.

8 And their dead bodies [lie] in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified: 9 and they of the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations look upon their dead bodies three days and a half, and suffer not their dead bodies to be laid in a sepulchre.

This city which 'spiritually,' i. e. with symbolical significance, is so variously named, with reference to its different forms of moral corruption, to its persecutions of the Lord and His people, and to the judgments inflicted upon it, is certainly 'the great city' of this world, the same which in

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subsequent visions is called Babylon. It represents the world in its enmity against the Lord and His kingdom, in the sense of the following, and, indeed, of all the Scriptures: "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you (1 John iii. 13). If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you (John xv. 18). Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world: if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him; for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John ii. 15–16). The friendship of the world is enmity with God: whosoever, therefore, would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God" (James iv. 4). Consequently, in the words, 'where also their Lord was crucified,' the reference is not to Jerusalem, which is ever 'the holy city' (212) and the symbol of the church, but to the great city of this world, whose enmity crucified Him. What determines the meaning of the symbol is, that the citizens of this city are 'peoples and tribes and tongues and nations' (114), i. e. the inhabitants of the whole earth. We shall have a large development of this idea hereafter in the symbol of great Babylon. In the street, or streets, or, as some render it, 'in the broad street,' of this symbolical city 'the corpse,' or corpses, of the Lord's two witnesses lie unburied, are not allowed to be laid away in a tomb, to signify that the lifeless forms of Faith and Prayer continue to be observed after their power to work the wonders here ascribed to them has departed; and this continues for 'three days and a half,' in which probably there is an allusion to the time of our Lord's remaining under the power of death. Taken in comparison with 1260 days, covering the whole or a great part of this dispensation, this symbolical expression must designate a brief period; and, indeed, if this fearful eclipse of faith, and this loss of the power of prayer, should be of long continuance, it would be as if the Lord had never risen from the dead.

10 And they that dwell upon the earth rejoice over them, and make merry; and they will send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwell upon the earth.

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Faith and Prayer are called 'witnesses' and 'prophets,' and are represented as 'prophesying,' in allusion to the fulness with which their power was exercised by the prophets, and because they testify to the reality of the spiritual world, the hidden things of which are disclosed unto them. These earth-dwellers are still the inhabitants of 'the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt,' i. e. the anti-christian world: and they rejoice and make merry and send gifts one to another over the death of the witnesses, because, while Faith and Prayer were living powers, they tormented them by the evidence they gave of the reality of the unseen world, by awakening their convictions of sin and fears of punishment, and by calling down upon them the judgments of God, as indispensable to the establishment of His kingdom upon earth. But, now, whilst they look upon the corpses of His witnesses, seeing that there are no such living powers as Faith and Prayer, they are no longer troubled with convictions or fears, and they give themselves up to mutual congratulations, feasting, and merry-making, to all luxurious and sensual delights, to 'the lusts of the flesh, and the lusts of the eye, and the pride of life,' as having no faith in the spiritual world, nor in a judgment to come, as having fallen wholly under the power of the beast out of the abyss, material scepticism. For they who lose faith soon come to live as saying, 'Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die' (1 Cor. xv. 22). Seeing that their time is short, they will make the most of it.

11 And after three days and a half, the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them that beheld them 12 And I heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither; and they went up in a cloud into heaven, and their enemies beheld them.

The best manuscripts are about evenly divided between 'I heard' and 'they heard,' but the difference is of no significance. According to the interpretation given, this resurrection of the witnesses must represent a great revival of the power of Faith and Prayer: and their ascension to heaven in

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a cloud, probably a luminous one, signifies that Faith and Prayer, or the Prayer of Faith now goes up again before God, as we have seen (165) the prayers of the saints going up before Him in the incense-cloud of the Lord's merit and righteousness (170). 'The Spirit of life' that enters into them is the Holy Spirit who is ever the life of Faith and Prayer; and the great voice from heaven commanding them to ascend into heaven is that of God enabling His people, after the brief reign of scepticism, again to offer up the prayer, and to exercise all the powers, of faith. Now, therefore, the unbelieving world, when they see the witnesses restored to life, and going up to heaven, i. e. when they see that faith and prayer have power with God, are smitten with spiritual awe and fear, as is always the case when the prayer of faith goes up before God from the hearts of His people. For such prayers are answered in judgments upon the world, as the Lord's resurrection and the prayers of His disciples, when the Spirit was poured out upon them in Pentecostal affusion, were followed by the overthrow and destruction of the people and nation who had rejected and crucified Him. Hence a representation of these judgments closes the vision.

13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth part of the city fell; and there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand persons; and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

As soon as the power of Faith and Prayer is restored, as soon as the petition, 'Thy kingdom come,' goes up again from believing souls, the judgments come. There is no delay, for God will 'speedily' avenge His own elect who cry day and night unto Him (Luke xviii. 8). This earthquake, or shaking of heaven and earth, is doubtless the same with that of the sixth seal (146), and is to be taken here with all the other phenomena there described. The words, 'a tenth part of the city fell,' are to be understood in the sense, that a definitely limited number (59) of the ungodly world are cut off in their sins, 'the remnant' being subdued to

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faith. The statement, that 'seven thousand persons [literally, names] were killed,' symbolizes the fulness or effectualness of the judgment (14). Hence it is added, that 'the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven,' i. e. they submitted themselves in faith to His all-conquering power. For this is the last in that great series of judgments which the Lord finds necessary to inflict upon the world in subduing it unto Himself, and all those that follow are only the particulars of what is here summarily represented. Hence in the next vision we shall have a jubilate in heaven over the final establishment of His kingdom.

14 The second woe is past; behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

The order of time here, as before, is that of the visions, and not of the historical events. For it is thus that the sixth trumpet closes, leaving us in quickened expectation of the seventh and last, which, in the cyclical structure of the book, will return upon the ground already traversed, in order to exhibit in more ample particulars what has been previously indicated.

Meanwhile it is for us to take knowledge of the awful significance of this prophecy, that a time will come when a brutal and diabolical form of scepticism will overcome the power of Faith and Prayer; will deprive them of life and efficacy to such an extent that they will be little more than empty forms. Perhaps this time has already commenced; for it is plain enough to all men, that these two witnesses for God and the spiritual world have already become so weakened that they have but little left of the power here ascribed to them, and which undeniably they once possessed. Certainly they give but a feeble testimony compared with what it was when Abraham and Moses talked face to face with God; when Enoch and Elijah ascended to heaven; when the saints of old 'through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, [and] turned to flight the armies of the aliens' (Heb.

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xi. 33–35); when the apostolic church, without missionary boards or money contributions, in less than three centuries, revolutionized the world. What now has become of the faith of miracles? And who has told us that we have no need of them now, that they ought to have ceased? Have we heard this from the Lord in His word, or from this beast out of the abyss? Is there in the whole word of God an intimation that they should ever cease, except from the cause here given us in the death of these witnesses? On the contrary, every part of the Bible looks to their continuance, especially where they form a constituent element of the church's commission to evangelize the world: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. . . . And these signs shall follow them that believe: in my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with tongues; they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark xvi. 15–18). Here the power of miracles goes with the evangelizing commission, and if one be limited to the apostolic age, so also must the other. It is true, that modern criticism has thrown some doubt on the genuineness of this passage, yet, in any case, it shows us how the Lord's teaching on this subject was understood by the apostolic church. In fact, the notion that miracles ought to have ceased is a mere theory, invented without a particle of Scriptural warrant to explain and justify the loss of that faith by which they were wrought. And there is as much need of them now as there ever was. For it must be evident to all who can see anything that they would now have as much power to confute scepticism, and to convince men of the reality of the spiritual world, as they ever had. If we could heal the sick and raise the dead, as the apostles did, our preaching would shake the world to its foundations, as theirs did. And what has become of that prayer of faith which corresponds to the Lord's declarations: "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do (John xv. 13). If ye shall ask anything of the Father in my name, He will give it unto you (xvi. 23). All things whatsoever ye shall

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ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them"? (Mark xi. 24). Over and over again He repeats such assurances, as if with great anxiety lest they should not make their due impression, and their deep significance should be lost in subsequent ages, as, indeed, but little of it now seems to remain in the church. How much further is all this to go before it can be said that the Lord's two witnesses have been overcome and slain by the beast out of the abyss? Yet, for our unspeakable consolation, we are here assured that, after a brief period, they shall be raised from the dead: and who of those that 'wait for the consolation of Israel' (Luke ii. 25) can doubt but that, before the coming of the kingdom, Faith and Prayer will recover all the powers that they ever had? The Lord hasten it in its time!

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XXVI

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET JUBILATE IN HEAVEN FOR THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM XI 15–19

The visions of the seventh and last trumpet include all that are to follow up to the close of the dispensation (200), as explained in the following extract from Alford's Commentary: 'The relation in detail will follow, preceding which we are permitted to hear these voices in heaven of thanksgiving for that the hour of God's kingdom and vengeance has now come. In the following visions we shall see the nature and methods of the Lord's taking possession of His kingdom, the rewards which He gives to His servants, and the destruction He inflicts upon them that destroy the earth. . . . Notice (1) that the seventh seal, the seventh trumpet, and the seventh vial [chalice] are differently accompanied from any which precede them in each particular series: (2) at each seventh member of its series, (a) we see and hear what takes place, not on earth, but in heaven; (b) we have it solemnly related in the form of a conclusion (161); (c) we have plain indication in the imagery, or by direct expression, that the end has come, or is close at hand. . . . All this makes it plain that the three series of visions are not continuous, but resumptive . . but each evolving something which was not in the former, and putting the course of God's providence in a different light. It is true, that the seals involve the trumpets, and the trumpets the vials, but it is not a mere temporal succession; the involution and inclusion are far deeper.'

15 And the seventh angel sounded his trumpet: and there followed great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world is become [the kingdom] of our Lord and His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.

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This seventh and last trumpet is, as we have seen, that of which St. Paul speaks as announcing the resurrection (200); and since all these trumpets of the Apocalypse are unquestionably symbolical, that of St. Paul also must be so understood. Here, then, we have a vision of the grand result of the whole scheme of divine providence, as already accomplished, celebrated by a grand jubilate in heaven: for these great voices are doubtless those of the whole heavenly host, including the unfallen angels, God being their Lord no less than ours, and they partaking of the thanksgiving and joy for that Christ now receives His covenanted reward.

16 And the four and twenty elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, 17 saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, who art, and who wast, for that thou hast taken thy great power and dost reign.

As when the Lamb took the seven-sealed book out of the hand of Him that sat upon the throne, and entered upon His mediatorial government (123), so now again, when His kingdom is established, these Thrones and Powers of the angelic host (111) fall upon their faces and worship God with thanksgiving and praise for that He has at last taken unto Himself, i. e. put forth, His almighty power, and subdued the rebellion that has so long taxed all the resources of His patience, and that He has consummated His reign of righteousness upon the earth. Probably it is in speaking these words, as a continuation of the preceding, that 'the great voices in heaven' have been heard. They add 'Almighty' to 'Lord God' because it is by His all-mightiness that this subjugation is effected, and because the word includes, as we have seen, the idea of All-Ruler (23). In some Greek texts, as in the English Bible, we have 'who art, and who wast, and who art to come,' but this last clause is not in the best manuscripts, and apparently with design, to signify that, in this proleptical view, the Lord is regarded as having already come and established His kingdom (13). The heavenly host are filled with gratitude and joy that He has at last made an end of the enormous evil which has so

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long ravaged the world of mankind; which must always have been to them, as holy beings, infinitely repugnant and hateful, and, as finite creatures, no less a mystery than it is to us. Hence their joy may be understood as including that of comprehending the divine purposes with respect to this evil, and, especially, that, through all preceding ages since it commenced, the eternal All-Ruler has been working for its extinction.

18 And the nations were wroth, and thy wrath is come, and the time for the dead to be judged, and to give the reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to them that fear thy name, both small and great, and to destroy them that destroy the earth.

This may be a continuation of the song of the elders and heavenly host, or a comment by the Apocalyptist upon what he has just seen and heard. The wrath of the nations in their great rebellion against God and His Messiah King, is first mentioned (Ps. ii. 1–3), in order to contrast it with the wrath of God by which it has now been subdued (ii. 4–12). The heavenly host rejoice and give thanks at this manifestation of the divine wrath, and that the time for the dead to be judged has come, because the promised reward shall now be given to the prophets and saints and all the servants of God, both small and great, i. e. the least not being overlooked, and because they who have destroyed the earth shall now themselves be destroyed. In this last particular we have a full justification of this rejoicing at the outpouring of the wrath of God, for thus only can the earth be delivered from its destroyers. In fact, all the plagues written in this book are rendered necessary, as we have seen, by nothing else but the obdurate stubbornness of these earth-destroyers (220), who cannot in any other way be made to cease from their work of destruction.

19 And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple, and there were lightnings and voices and thunders and earthquake and great hail.

These are certainly the words of the Seer describing what he saw and heard. This opening of the heavenly temple and

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disclosure of the ark are deeply involved symbols. For the temple, as we have seen, is the constant symbol of God's peculiar dwelling place, and hence of His church (95); and the ark of His covenant, whose covering was the mercy-seat, upon which rested the shekinah of His presence and glory, is the symbol of His mercy and covenant faithfulness; also, of His 'strength' or power put forth in fulfilling all His promises of reward unto His servants; and pre-eminently of those in which He has given unto His Son 'the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession,' as in the words of the Psalm:

> Arise, O Lord, into thy rest,
> Thou, and the ark of thy strength (cxxxii. 8).

Consequently, this opening of the temple and disclosure of the ark are to be understood as the manifestation of God's immediate presence, covenant faithfulness, mercy, and power in fulfilling His promises, and of their fulfilment as now rendered visible in this crowning result, in which the Lord takes possession of His inheritance, and gives their promised reward to His servants. The meaning of the temple, as representing the true church (211), must not be left out of view, according to which its being opened so as to let the ark be seen emphasizes the manifested fulfilment of those promises in the experience of God's people, as now made perfect in holiness, and enjoying their covenanted reward. In these symbols, moreover, there seems to be an allusion to the rending of the veil of the temple which took place at the crucifixion of the Lord, whereby the ark of the covenant behind it was made visible to the worshippers, the symbolical meaning of which is authoritatively interpreted for us in substance, as follows: 'This sacred veil represented the flesh or humanity of the Lord, and its rending symbolized His crucifixion, or sacrificial death (Heb. ix. 7–8), whereby the way into the holiest of all (x. 20), i. e. into the inmost presence of God reconciled, was laid open to all who should come unto God by Him.' The vision, as in other similar cases (225), closes with a recurrence to the judgments in and

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through which the crowning result is realized. For these lightnings and voices and thunders go forth out of the throne of God, and are the symbols of the forces of nature, but here in preternatural and destructive commotion, as in the sixth seal (146), implying all the other phenomena there described. This earthquake also we have had before, and this great hail (172), which will be more particularly considered hereafter.

The constant recurrence in these visions, and, indeed, throughout the whole Scripture, of the idea, that it is only through great judgments that the Lord will finally come into His kingdom (169), is directly opposed to the common belief, that this glorious consummation will be brought about by the benign influences of grace, under which the world will be gradually converted and saved from sin (170). This latter view of the mystery of God in dealing with the evil finds no countenance in His word; it is altogether unscriptural and pernicious. For it utterly fails to appreciate the enormity of sin, the obstinacy of its rebellion, its power to resist and abuse divine grace, and the true nature of God's justice, which requires that they who persist, against all the influences of grace, in destroying the earth shall themselves be destroyed; and it blinds men's minds to the truth, which has many important applications, that 'the day of the Lord' is always 'a day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men' (2 Pet. iii. 7), so that it must needs bring with it the destruction of all who cannot be subdued to repentance and faith by the influences of grace. We ought never to forget that the Lord has to deal with mankind as with a race of obstinate rebels; and that there is but one way to escape the punishment we deserve, i. e. by the submission of faith and trust in Him as our rightful Lord and only Saviour, for this is the meaning of His word from beginning to end. Hence the exhortation which is endlessly repeated:

> Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way,
> For His wrath will soon be kindled.
> Blessed are all they that take refuge in Him (Ps. ii. 12).

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XXVII

THE TRAVAILING WOMAN HER CHILD AND THE DRAGON THE CHURCH CHRIST AND SATAN XII. 1–17

In the preceding visions we have had fearful exhibitions of the enormity of the evil that is in the world, especially through the great judgments which are found necessary to subdue it. In this one we have some account of its origin, as if in answer to such questions as the following, which are not expressed for the reason, as it would seem, that they spontaneously and inevitably occur to every mind: Whence this enormous all-pervading evil in God's world? Is it original in human nature? Or has it come in from some foreign source? Thus, as we have just had a proleptical view of its final extinction, here we have a retrospective glance at its origin, in further illustration of its inveterate obstinacy and malignity, and apparently to show that it is not original in, and consequently is separable from, human nature, but not from that of Satan and his angels.

1 And a great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars upon her head.

This sign appears in the heaven or sky as being a revelation from God: it is great in a literal sense, as occupying a great space, and in a figurative sense, with reference to its vast significance. For the woman is the symbol of the church, more especially at the commencement of the vision, of the Old Testament church. She is a woman to denote her receptivity of life and fruitfulness from God who is her husband:

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The Maker is thy husband,
The Lord of hosts is His name (Is. liv. 5) :

also, to denote her motherhood, both of the human nature of Christ, with special reference to the ever-blessed Virgin Mary, and of His brethren, all the human children of God, who are called her seed. She is clothed with the sun, as being all-glorious herself, and the source of light, in allusion to the words of the Lord: "Ye are the light of the world" (Mat. v. 14), and perhaps to the following:

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning,
Fair as the moon, clear as the sun,
Terrible as an army with banners? (Cant. vi. 10).

She has the moon under her feet, to signify that, in her spiritual essence, she is above and destined to survive all the perturbations of time and sense, which are symbolized by the moon's changing phases (214). And she has a crown of twelve stars upon her head (109), to represent the completeness of the number of her children, who are also her glory, and in allusion to the promises: "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven (Gen. xxii. 17).

They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament;
And they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever" (Dan. xii. 3).

2 And she, being with child, crieth out, travailing in birth and in anguish to be delivered.

This represents the sorrowful travail of the Old Testament church with the mighty birth which she carried from the time its living germ was deposited in her bosom in the promise, 'that the Seed of the woman should crush the serpent's head' (Gen. iii. 15). It is this serpent-crushing Seed which she now labors to bring forth; and hence the enmity of the dragon, or serpent, who now seeks to devour Him as soon as He shall be born. The emphasis which is laid upon her 'anguish to be delivered' is to be understood of the burden borne by the Old Testament church in preparation for the coming of the Lord, of her intense desire for the great event while it was so long delayed, and of the fearful crisis which she passed through at the time.

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3 And another sign was seen in heaven: and, behold, a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns and seven diadems upon his heads.

This is the second of the bestial forms in these visions (221). As subsequently interpreted by the Apocalyptist himself, it is the symbol of 'the old serpent that is called the devil and Satan.' He is a serpent or dragon, in allusion to the form in which he tempted our first parents and to denote the double-tongued subtlety and falsehood, the grovelling bestiality, and the quenchless enmity to mankind, of his fallen and ruined nature, together with his destiny to have his head crushed under the heel of the Seed of the woman (Gen. iii. 1–15).* He is of a blood-red color, because he is the primary cause of all the bloodshed in the world (130), as in our Lord's words: "He was a murderer from the beginning" (John viii. 44). His seven heads are symbolical of the fulness of his intellectual powers as subtlety (14); 'not that wisdom which cometh down from above, but that which is earthly, sensual, devilish' (James iii. 15), as where it is said: "The serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field" (Gen. iii. 1). His ten horns represent his power as definitely limited; the horn being the symbol of power (188), and the number 10 that of definite limitation (59). Of these symbols, however, i. e. seven heads and ten horns, we shall have hereafter a further and more concrete development and interpretation (Rev. xvii. 9–12). In fine, his seven diadems represent the kingdoms, secular powers and governments, of the world, in allusion to the words of the Lord where He calls him 'the prince of this world' (John xiv. 30), and to Satan's offer to bestow all these kingdoms upon Him, saying: "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Mat. iv. 9). All these symbols will frequently recur in subsequent visions where their significance will become more explicit.

4 And his tail sweepth down a third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth.

* For a larger development of this symbol, see *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, vii.

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The sublimity of this imagery is very striking, in that the dragon, with the vast sweep of his tail casts down to the earth a third part of the stars of heaven; and its meaning is no less sublime, for the stars here are the symbols of the angels, as in the following passages:

> Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth. . . .
> When the morning stars sang together,
> And all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job xxxviii. 4-7).
> How art thou fallen from heaven,
> O Lucifer, son of the morning! . .
> For thou hast said in thy heart, I will ascend into heaven;
> I will exalt my throne above the stars of God (Is. xiv. 12-13).

Hence the dragon, sweeping with his tail a third part of the stars to the earth, signifies that Satan drew a large proportion of the angelic host after him in his primal fall; which also will be more fully unfolded hereafter.

4 And the dragon stood before the woman that was about to bring forth, that, when she should bring forth, he might devour her child.

The description of this child given below cannot possibly refer to any but the Lord Jesus; and these words picture the eagerness of Satan to destroy Him, as the Seed of the woman by whom his head was to be crushed; that eagerness which was manifested in Herod's attempt to cut Him off in His infancy, in His temptation in the wilderness, and in all the enmity of the Jews which finally resulted in His crucifixion.

5 And she brought forth a man child, who is to shepherd all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught away unto God and to His throne.

The words here rendered 'a man child' are literally 'a male son,' His masculine sex being emphasized by this repetition perhaps to signify that He is the source of life. His shepherding the nations with a rod of iron we have had before (78). The adversary does not succeed in destroying Him by reason of the limitation of his power (235); for the child is caught away from him 'unto God and to His throne';

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which refers to the resurrection and ascension of the Lord, and to His being made a partaker of His Father's throne (104), in fulfilment of the prophecy:

> The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand,
> Until I make thine enemies thy footstool (Ps. cx. 1).

6 And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that there they should nourish her a thousand two hundred and sixty days.

After the ascension and glorification of her great Seed the church flees from the persecutions of her enemy 'into the wilderness,' i. e. she is driven, as by the persecutions of the martyr age, into a state of separation and sequestration from the world, which God has prepared for her, that she may be nourished in her spiritual life, and where the machinations of Satan are frustrated by the blood of the martyrs becoming the seed of the church: in all which there is a plain allusion to the typical flight of the Old Testament church from her Egyptian persecutors into the wilderness, where she was nourished with manna from heaven, until she came to the borders of the promised land. Hence the time, 1260 days, of the New Testament church's sojourn in this prepared place or state of sequestration seems to be that of her pilgrimage through the wilderness of this world to the heavenly Canaan. This flight into the wilderness is anticipated here, and there will be a return to it in the sequel.

7 And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels warring with the dragon; and the dragon warred, and his angels, 8 and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven; 9 and the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent that is called the devil and Satan, who deceiveth the whole world; he was cast down unto the earth, and his angels were cast down with him.

The retrospective view which has been taken in this vision now extends further into the past, as if in answer to the questions: Who, and from whence is this great red dragon, this great power of evil, that seeks to destroy the Lord Himself? How came there to be any such power in a universe

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created by God? Here, then, we are informed, that it originated on the heights of the spiritual world, among the angels themselves; that, at some time in the depths of past ages, there was a great rebellion and war in heaven; wherein Satan, who seems to have been one of the most exalted of 'the sons of God,' and who probably was known among them by the name of Lucifer, or Day Star, headed the rebels; whilst one who bore the name of Michael was the leader of those who remained loyal, and 'kept their first estate' (Jude 6). But who is this Michael? He is called 'the archangel' (Jude 9), 'the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people,' 'one of the first of the princes'; and he is spoken of by 'one like the appearance of a man' (Dan. xii. 1; x. 13) as follows: "Now will I return to fight with the prince of Persia; and when I go forth, lo, the prince of Grecia will come . . . and there is none that strengtheneth himself with me against these, but Michael your prince" (Dan. x. 20–21): of all which we understand as yet but very little. The name, however, signifies one like unto God. Of course, the issue of this rebellion in heaven could not be doubtful. Satan and his angels were defeated and cast down to the earth; we have seen him before as 'a star that had fallen from heaven' (179); in consequence of which he set himself to 'deceive the whole world'; and his first exploit in this line seems to have been in the temptation and fall of man. Such is the answer here given to the questions implied; thus far the word of God in explanation of the origin of evil; but neither here nor elsewhere have we any attempt to explain philosophically how it could thus have arisen; and this, doubtless, because to the finite mind it is and must ever remain an incomprehensible mystery.

10 And I heard a great voice in heaven saying, Then was the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of His Christ, for the accuser of our brethren, who accuseth them day and night before God, was cast down.

This great voice is that of the heavenly host rejoicing that Satan has been cast out of heaven. The translation com-

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monly given is, 'Now is come the salvation,' and 'the accuser is cast down'; but without any satisfactory reason for rendering these two verbs in the present, when they are both undeniably in a past tense. Scholars have been 'driven' (Dean Alford's word *in loco*) to take this unwarrantable liberty by the word ἄρτι, which commonly means 'now,' and with which the song begins; but it is often used with reference both to past and to future events; and, in the former case, it may properly be rendered 'then,' as the past tense of these two verbs absolutely requires that it should be here. For this song is a jubilation over the casting down of Satan out of heaven, whereby heaven itself has been saved from wreck and ruin, and God's power and reign and the authority of His eternal Son have been established against this great rebellion in the spiritual world. It is to be observed also that the holy angels, from whom this voice proceeds, speak of Satan as 'the accuser,' not of themselves, but 'of their brethren,' i. e. of the saints on earth, because 'the whole family in heaven and earth' (Eph. iii. 15) is one brotherhood, having one Father, God: and this word 'accuser' has reference to his name, the devil, i. e. slanderer, in which character he brings such slanderous accusations against them (Job i. 8–11), as those which he urged against the patriarch (ii. 4–5). But from the emphasis here laid upon it, in that 'he accuses them day and night before God,' it probably involves a mystery which we very imperfectly understand.

11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony, and they loved not their lives even unto death.

Here the song passes, by a somewhat abrupt transition, from the victory over Satan in heaven to that of the saints upon earth. For the antecedent of 'they' is the 'brethren' of the angels; and the failure of the great adversary in his primal rebellion is taken as typical and prophetic of that which he suffers from the faith and patience of the saints; who overcome him by reason of the blood of the

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Lamb shed for them, and by the power of their testimony, which they joyfully seal with their blood.

12 Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and ye that dwell therein: [but] woe to the earth and to the sea, because the devil is gone down unto you having great wrath, knowing that he hath little time.

Whilst the casting down of Satan is thus a matter of rejoicing to them that dwell [literally, tabernacle] in heaven it is a great 'woe to the earth,' i. e. to the natural life of man (172), and 'to the sea,' his political organizations (174); for in consequence of this fall he goes down among them in great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time to make the most of it.

13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast down unto the earth, he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child: 14 and there were given unto the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she should fly into the wilderness unto her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and a half time from the face of the serpent.

The vision, having taken up the prophetic significance of its retrospect, returns now to the woman, in order more fully to unfold what has been too briefly touched upon before. The rage of the dragon against her is referred to two causes: (1) to the indignity that has been put upon him in his being cast down to the earth; (2) to her having brought forth the man child, the Seed that is to crush his head (236). But again his designs are frustrated because of the limitation of his power. For there are given unto her 'the two wings of the great eagle that she should fly into the wilderness,' in evident allusion to the typical flight of Israel into the wilderness from their Egyptian persecutions (237), and particularly to the words in which they were reminded of God's providence and tender care for them in their flight: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bear you on eagle's wings, and brought you unto myself (Ex. xix. 4).

> As an eagle that stirreth up her nest,
> That fluttereth over her young,
> He spread abroad His wings, He took them,
> He bore them on His pinions" (Deut. xxxii. 11).

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Hence it seems altogether probable that 'the great eagle' became a proverbial expression the meaning of which, as a symbol of God's providential care for His people under persecution, was commonly understood. Thus He is here represented as bearing His New Testament church into the wilderness of sequestration from the world, where only she can be safe from the persecutions of the enemy, and be adequately nourished with bread from heaven. The 'time, times, and a half time,' during which she is to remain thus secluded, and 'her life hidden with God' (Col. iii. 3), are identical with the 1260 days, and with the 42 months (237), during which the court of the temple is given up to the gentiles, and they tread the holy city (214).

15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be swept away by the flood: 16 and the earth helped the woman; and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

Even in this wilderness of sequestration and consecration the church is followed by the enmity of her great adversary; for this flood which he casts out of his mouth after her symbolizes his persecutions, and particularly those of the martyr age. What is signified by the earth helping the woman is to be understood from the fact, that the first nominally Christian emperor caused persecution to cease for a time (59). For his government, though nominally Christian, seems to be regarded here as belonging essentially to the natural life of man, of which the earth is the constant symbol (172): and political life, which is a special form of that which is natural, though elsewhere represented by the sea, seems here to be included in the symbol of the earth taken as composed of sea and land.

17 And the dragon was wroth concerning the woman, and went away to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus.

The divine protection thus vouchsafed to the church has no other effect upon her adversary than to excite his rage against 'the remnant of her seed,' i. e. those who have

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escaped martyrdom. Against these, because they keep the commandments of God, and hold fast their testimony or confession of the Lord Jesus, he continues to wage unceasing warfare, as in his persecutions and temptations in all subsequent ages.

This vision contains several points of vital interest, especially the following:

1. There is a great personal adversary of God and man; this idea, however, stands out on every page of the book. But here we see that he was once an exalted angel, who fell into rebellion, was cast out of heaven, and ever since has made it his supreme object to frustrate the benevolent purposes of God, and to destroy mankind. This great truth we know only from revelation, but it runs through the whole Scripture, from the temptation in Eden to the casting of this adversary into the lake of fire (Rev. xx. 10). Nor is it any more incredible that there should be evil spirits than wicked men.

2. The benefits of this revealed truth are very great; for it gives us the assurance that the evil from which we suffer is not original in human nature, but has come in from a foreign source, and consequently is separable from us, so that we can be saved from it. For probably the reason why there is no salvation for the fallen angels is, that sin is original with them, and consequently inseparable from their nature.

3. Belief in this truth is one of our greatest helps in resisting our temptations. For if we regard our sin as original with us, or as the working of an impersonal principle without us, we have no strength to make head against it. Self cannot fight self. It takes two to make a fight. But when we understand that our temptations originate from a personal enemy without ourselves, our animosity against him is excited, and we can resist him till he flees from us (James iv. 7). Hence, when he can persuade men that they have no such enemy, then he has his will of them, they betray themselves into his power, and he satisfies upon them his horrid lust of torment.

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4. We see here that the only place or state in which we can be safe from his assaults, and adequately nourished with 'the hidden manna,' is the wilderness of sequestration from the world and consecration to God (66). It is here only that Satan can do us no harm.

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XXVIII

THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA ANTICHRISTIAN SECULAR POWER XIII 1–10

This is the third of the bestial forms in these visions, and it stands in the closest relation to the second (235), inasmuch as it represents one of the principal means or instrumentalities by which the great adversary works out his enmity against the Lord and His people.

1 And I stood upon the sand of the sea: and I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and upon his horns ten diadems, and upon his heads names of blasphemy. 2 And the beast that I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet [were] as of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.

There are variations in the manuscripts here which leave it somewhat doubtful whether it is the Seer or the dragon that stands upon the sea shore: I have adopted the reading which seems most probable to me, as giving the point of view from which the beast is seen. The sea is the constant symbol of national life in its stormy agitations and surging violence (174); consequently this form of evil which arises out of it is best understood as that of antichristian political or secular power (220): and this interpretation is abundantly confirmed by the significant allusions here to the four beasts which the prophet Daniel saw rising out of the sea, one of which was like a leopard, another like a bear, another like a lion, and the fourth 'was diverse from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns' (Dan. vii. 2–7). For here we have a beast with ten horns, rising out of the sea, like a leopard, with the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a

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lion; a combination of the first three in Daniel's vision, in order to constitute the fourth, which was 'dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly; and he had great iron teeth; he devoured and broke in pieces and stamped the remnant with his feet' (Dan. vii. 7). And the interpretation of these symbols which was divinely given to the prophet was, that they represented 'kings,' i. e. political or secular powers; to which it was added: "The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all the kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall thresh it down, and break it in pieces" (Dan. vii. 17–23). Hence we need not hesitate to take this beast which was seen by St. John as intended to symbolize antichristian secular power in general, but with special reference to the persecuting empire of pagan Rome, which, as all interpreters agree, is represented by the fourth beast in Daniel's vision. All his characteristic traits still further confirm this interpretation. For this power is represented as a beast, to signify that it is essentially brutal, incapable of the knowledge of God and divine things (220). The beast by which it is symbolized combines the qualities of the leopard, the bear, and the lion, to denote its ferocious and destructive cruelty, as exemplified in the bloody persecutions of the primitive Christians, and often since. He has the seven heads and ten horns of the dragon with the same significance, and to identify him as a form or manifestation of that great power of evil (235); for the dragon gives to him his power and his throne and great authority: in other words, Satan installs antichristian secular power as his vicegerent, to carry on his warfare against the Lord and 'the remnant of the seed of the woman, who keep the commandments of God, and hold the testimony of Jesus' (241). But it should not be overlooked, that his horns are first mentioned, and he has his diadems upon them, and not upon his heads, in both which particulars he differs from the dragon, to denote that this form of antichristian power is maintained and exercised not so much by subtlety and craft as by force and violence. These horns, moreover, as we shall see in a subsequent vision (Rev. xvii. 12), are taken to repre-

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sent the inferior political powers which arose out of the ruins of the Roman empire, as in Daniel's vision: "As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise" (Dan. vii. 24). The significance of the 'names of blasphemy' upon the heads of this beast will appear in the sequel. All these traits of antichristian secular power were so amply and particularly exemplified in the government of pagan Rome that the subject need not be more than alluded to here. But whether this beast represents merely the abstract idea of antichristian secular power, or a personal spiritual being distinct from Satan, one of his angels, who acts as the animating spirit of that power, I shall not undertake to decide. Certainly there is nothing unscriptural in this latter supposition, and we shall see hereafter that he is cast 'alive' into the lake of fire and brimstone (Rev. xx. 10).

3 And [I saw] one of his heads as wounded unto death, and his wound of death was healed.

Wonderful, indeed, is the prophecy contained in this striking symbol. For certainly pagan Rome was one of the seven heads of antichristian secular power, the other six will be named hereafter. But when Constantine, the first nominally Christian emperor, was established upon the throne at the commencement of the fourth century, the government ceased to be antichristian, persecution was intermitted for a time, and Christianity became, in some sort, the religion of the empire. It was in this way that its antichristian and persecuting power received what seemed as if it might prove a fatal wound. But this wound was effectually healed when the political powers which arose upon the dissolution of the empire became the instruments of the papacy unto renewed persecutions; when it became the custom for that persecuting power to 'deliver heretics over to the secular arm' to be put to death, after the example of the Jews in causing the Lord to be crucified by the Roman authorities: for these 'heretics,' so called, were often the true people of God. Its healing appears also in the persecutions of the Waldenses and Albigenses and Huguenots, especially in the St. Bar-

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tholomew massacre, in those of 'bloody Mary,' in the persecuting wars of Charles V. and Philip II., and in a thousand other instances.

3 And the whole earth wondered after the beast: 4 and they worshipped the dragon because he gave the authority unto the beast; and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? and, Who is able to make war with him?

This represents the universality of antichristian political organizations or governments, and of the 'worship,' or reverence and submission of mind, which they have always exacted and received from their subjects: for claiming to be absolute, and to hold their illegitimate powers 'by divine right,' they subjugate even the minds of men; and thus, by putting themselves in the place of God as lords of the human conscience, they become the instruments of Satan and truly Satanic. Hence in worshipping them with this submission of mind men worship Satan, who gives them this authority; they become devil-worshippers. The moral character which is here and everywhere in Scripture ascribed to civil government is to be carefully noted. Here we see that it is not to be regarded as an abstraction nor as a compact, nor as a corporation without a soul, but as a moral creature of God, and necessarily Christian or antichristian. In the liturgic expressions of his worshippers, 'Who is like unto the beast? and Who is able to make war with him?' there is a blasphemous imitation of such ascriptions to God as the following: "To whom, then, will ye liken God? (Is. xl. 18). To whom will ye liken me, and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?" (xlvi. 5). Hence the 'names of blasphemy' upon the heads of the beast.

5 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies: and there was given unto him authority to do [his works] forty and two months: 6 and he opened his mouth unto blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle, them that dwell in heaven.

This, in connection with the 'names of blasphemy,' is to be taken with special, though by no means exclusive refer-

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ence to the Roman emperors in their impious claims to divine honors, in their rescripts and ordinances that worship should be paid to them as gods, and in persecuting unto death those who denied their divinity, as we have seen in the martyrdom of Polycarp. For they had their altars set up in every city, and exacted that religious offerings should be made unto themselves, the refusal of which became a common test of Christian profession. It was by these sacrilegious claims and persecuting laws that they opened their mouths in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name, and His tabernacle; i. e. heaven, and all holy beings dwelling therein; who, so far from claiming these great things for themselves, fall upon their faces, and cast their crowns before His throne (115). But the particular allusion to the Roman emperors does by no means exhaust the fulness of this symbol, for wherever political powers claim to be absolute, and exert their authority to coerce the faith or consciences of their subjects, they become antichristian; they put themselves in the place of God, and blaspheme His name, and all who dwell in heaven, who render unto Him a free and cordial service. Thus, indeed, they become the beast, to whom the dragon gives his power and throne and great authority, that thereby they should cause men to worship him (241). The time during which they are permitted to do these works, 42 months, we have had before (237), and seen that it covers a great part of the dispensation in which we live.

7 And it was given unto him to make war with the saints and to overcome them: and authority was given unto him over every tribe and people and tongue and nation: 8 and all that dwell upon the earth will worship him, [every one] whose name hath not been written in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain in sacrifice from the foundation of the world.

This world-tyranny is allowed to persecute and overcome the saints in the sense of making them martyrs. Its authority over all the nations is not from God otherwise than by His providential permission, but immediately from Satan,

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who is here recognized as 'the prince of this world' (John xii. 31). It has no power to subdue or subjugate the minds of the saints; they do not worship it, because they are followers of the Lamb who has been slain in sacrifice, and their names are written in His book of life (86); consequently they count not their mortal lives dear unto themselves, in comparison with His honor and glory. There is a difference of opinion among the interpreters, whether the words, 'from the foundation of the world,' are connected with 'whose name hath not been written in the book of life,' or with 'the Lamb that hath been slain'; for both these ideas are perfectly Scriptural, and, indeed, both may be intended. In support of the former, we have God's eternal purpose in the election of His people out of the world, which has been amply recognized in these visions (158), especially in the measuring of the temple, and in the sealing of the cxliv thousand; for in virtue of their election it could be fitly said, that their names have been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. For the latter connection, we may recall the words: "A Lamb without blemish and without spot, [even] Christ, who verily was ordained before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. i. 19–20). Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts ii. 23): as, also, the typical representation of His sacrifice by the clothing of the first human sinners in the skins of sacrificial animals,* and in the sacrifice of Abel: in view of all which it could be as fitly said, that the Lamb had been slain from the foundation of the world. But though both of these ideas may be intended, it would seem that the former ought to have the preference, because it is clearly expressed in a subsequent vision: "They that dwell upon the earth will wonder [after the beast] whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world" (Rev. xvii. 8).

9 **If any man hath an ear let him hear.**

* For the evidence on this point see *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, xi.

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A declaration of the importance to all men alike of what is disclosed in this vision (49).

10 If any man is for captivity, into captivity he goeth: if any man is for the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

The saints have just been forewarned that authority has been given unto the beast to make war upon them, and to overcome them in the sense of subjecting them to martyrdom, and here they are forewarned that no one will be able to escape his predetermined destiny in this respect, as in the prophet: "When they shall say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them. Thus saith the Lord,

> **Such as are for death, unto death,**
> **And such as are for the sword, unto the sword,**
> **And such as are for the famine, unto the famine,**
> **And such as are for the captivity, unto the captivity" (Jer. xv. 2; xliii. 11).**

Here, therefore, is the place for the exercise of their faith and patience. All these trials they must bear with resignation, as essential to the efficacy of their witness-bearing, and to the triumph of their cause in the end, in which they also themselves shall triumph. They must accept these persecutions as the Lord did His cross, because thus it stands written in the eternal all-wise purposes of God, and thus only can the crowning result be achieved.

Thus we see that this beast out of the sea is the symbol of nations and their governments in opposition to the Lord and His kingdom: one form of that great antichristian world-power, 'which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt,' which crucified the Lord (221), and of which we shall have hereafter a large development under the symbol of Great Babylon where this beast will reappear.

It should be a great consolation to us Americans, that our government has never been a persecuting power. However great our national sins, this certainly is not one of them. And though, from our persistent refusal to acknowledge God and His Christ in our fundamental and organic law, we have

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much to fear, yet we are not left without hope that for this sin we shall be forgiven, since we have never persecuted His saints; and that His forgiveness and grace will bring us at last to this acknowledgment, and will purify our national life from its manifold corruptions. For this blessed consummation surely we ought all to labor and pray without ceasing.

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XXIX

THE BEAST OUT OF THE EARTH ANTICHRISTIAN ECCLESIASTICAL POWER XIII 11–18

As in the preceding vision we have seen antichristian secular power symbolically represented, so here we have a no less striking symbol of antichristian ecclesiastical power, that is to say, of the church corrupted and perverted by the world, and persecuting the true people of God. We shall find also the closest relations subsisting between these two great enemies of the Lord and His kingdom; both of them being represented as beasts for reasons which have been given (220), but with demon modifications which will more fully appear in the sequel.

11 And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth: and he had two horns like unto a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.

As the symbol of antichristian political power rises out of the sea of nations and peoples (244), so appropriately that of antichristian church power rises out of the earth, which is the constant symbol of the natural life of man (153), to signify that, whatever the claims or pretensions of this power, it is nothing of a spiritual nature, but is, indeed, 'of the earth earthy' (1 Cor. xv. 47). Yet too much stress is not to be laid upon this distinction, inasmuch as these two forms of life are at bottom one and the same, political being only a special modification of natural life: and a fundamental identity between them seems to be recognized in the corresponding vision of Daniel, where the beasts that rise out of the sea are interpreted as representing 'kings' or governments that 'rise out of the earth' (Dan. vii. 3, 17). This one has

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the two horns of a lamb, the sacrificial animal, as claiming to be of a spiritual nature, and to derive his power from the Lamb of God, whose innocence and meekness he simulates: for antichristian church power always claims to be held from the Lord, to be exercised in His name for spiritual ends, with unblushing pretensions to lamblike innocence and meekness, as exemplified in the bloodiest persecutions of papal Rome, even those of the Spanish Inquisition. It is in all these false claims and teaching that this baleful power 'speaks as a dragon' or serpent, which connects it immediately with the great red dragon of the preceding vision, thus signifying that its wisdom is the wisdom of subtlety (235), that its teaching is a system of lies, 'a doctrine of devils' (1 Tim. iv. 1), that it speaks the words, and is an agent or instrument of 'the father of lies, who was also a murderer from the beginning' (John viii. 44).

12 And he exerciseth all the authority of the first beast before him; and he maketh the earth and them that dwell therein to worship the first beast whose wound of death was healed.

This authority, which was originally derived from Satan (244), he exercises 'before,' or in the presence of the former beast, in the sense that it is with his full consent and approbation, thus denoting the closest alliance between these two forms of antichristian power. The reference here, and, indeed, throughout the whole vision, to the papacy, as the most perfect example of antichristian church power, is very striking, and has often been pointed out; for that corrupt and apostate church has always claimed to exercise the authority of secular governments, and most of them have, at one time or another, submitted to her claims. Even to this day the pope claims to be a temporal prince. In this way she has caused mankind to worship antichristian secular power, as reproduced and embodied in herself with religious sanctions, and in the secular governments which have been upheld by her influence, with all their persecuting enormities and crimes: and thus, as we have seen before, the wound of the former beast was healed (246).

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13 And he doeth great signs, that he should even make fire to come down from heaven unto the earth before men: 14 and he deceiveth them that dwell upon the earth by the signs which were given unto him to do before the beast, saying unto them that dwell upon the earth, that they should make an image unto the beast which had the wound of the sword and did live.

These great signs are not to be understood as genuine, but as pretended miracles, similar to those of the Egyptian sorcerers before Pharaoh and his court, which are characterized as having been wrought 'by their secret arts' (Ex. vii. 11). Hence they are not said to be wrought before God, but 'before man' and 'before the former beast,' to denote that they are such as appear to be miracles, and are accepted as such by men in general and by the political powers. It is added, that by these signs the earth-dwellers, i. e. those who are immersed in the natural or earthly life, are deceived, or seduced, to make an image unto the beast whose wound was healed, and, as subsequently stated, to worship it; in other words, to reverence, and submit their minds and consciences to that antichristian and persecuting power which they set up in papal Rome in the exact image and likeness of pagan Rome. It may be also that we have here, as it were, a glance aside at that vast system of image worship which has been so long established in the papal church. However this may be, the idea of antichristian church power as a worker of pretended miracles, is of such importance that we shall find it still further developed and emphasized under the symbol of the false prophet into which this beast out of the earth is ultimately changed (Rev. xix. 20).

15 And it was given unto him to give a spirit unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

The meaning is, that this image of pagan Rome, set up in papal Rome, would be no lifeless idol, 'which could neither see nor hear nor walk' (193), but something infinitely more deadly, a living power, which would speak with authority, and cause those who should refuse to reverence and submit

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to it to be put to death. How all this has been realized in papal Rome need not be more than alluded to; for her whole history, until a few years ago she was shorn of her temporal power, was one continual exercise of it in causing to be put to death those who refused to acknowledge and submit to her authority.

16 And he causeth all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the free and the bond, to receive a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead; 17 and that no man should be able to buy or to sell, save he that had the mark, the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

We have here, both in expressive imagery and in literal description, the Romish excommunication and interdict, which prohibited all buying from, and selling to, an excommunicated person. No one was permitted to supply him with food or clothing, fire or light, nor to entertain him as a guest, however great his need, nor to minister to him in sickness, nor even to speak to him. The most diabolical maledictions were pronounced upon him in all the organs and parts of his body and mind, in the exercise of all his natural functions, and even in medical and surgical treatment. He was cast out from all communion with his fellow men, according to the literal meaning of the word, excommunication. And the interdict was the excommunication of a whole people, all of whom were prohibited from buying and selling, and placed under all the disabilities and maledictions of an excommunicated individual. The consequences of such interdicts, while the church retained her power to enforce them, were such enormous distress and misery as were utterly intolerable and altogether indescribable: and the greatest monarchs were sometimes compelled to make their submission on their knees with the most abject humiliations at the foot of the papal throne, in order to get them taken off from themselves and their people. Hence this mark of the beast on the forehead or right hand, which only could protect men from such consequences, is to be understood as their submission of mind, conscience, and life to the authority of antichristian ecclesiastical power.

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18 Here is wisdom. Let him that hath the understanding reckon the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

The emphatic declaration, 'Here is wisdom,' refers to what immediately follows, in order that the people of God may be impressed with its importance, and put on their guard against this baleful power. It expresses also what is equally true of all the symbols of these visions, and hence it has been adopted as the motto of this book. In order to ensure that this symbol shall be understood, the Apocalyptist is careful to put into our hands a key to its meaning, yet in the form of a riddle doubtless to preserve his work from being destroyed by the power which it holds up to reprobation. For if he had said in so many words, This vision represents a form of antichristianity which will be developed and signally exemplified hereafter in the church of Rome, it can hardly be doubted but that the work would have been excluded from the Sacred Canon, and every copy of it destroyed, when that church came to dominate over the civilized world. In order to preserve it from this fate the author put the key-word of this symbol into a riddle, which only those who 'had the understanding' would be able to solve. Indeed, very different solutions of it have been proposed, but they all rest on one fact, that the alphabet in those times was used as numerals; a custom which we still retain to a certain extent, as in the case of the Roman alphabet, in which X = 10, C = 100, D = 500, M = 1000. According to this mode of reckoning, e. g. the number of a man named Alexander, *Αλεξανδρος*, is as follows: *Α* = 1, *λ* = 30, *ε* = 5, *ξ* = 60, *α* = 1, *ν* = 50, *δ* = 4, *ρ* = 100, *ο* = 70, *ς* = 200; the sum of which = 521. Hence for the solution of this riddle what we have to do is to find a man's name the Greek letters of which have the numerical value of 666. Now, although several names would satisfy this condition, yet there is only one that agrees with the foregoing interpretation of the vision, and that is Lateinus, in Greek *Λατεινος*, the name of a man from whom the Roman or Latin people were supposed

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to be descended, and not uncommon among them, the numerical value of which is as follows: $\Lambda = 30$, $\alpha = 1$, $\tau = 300$, $\varepsilon = 5$, $\iota = 10$, $\nu = 50$, $o = 70$, $\varsigma = 200$, and the sum = 666. In confirmation of this solution it should be mentioned, that it was first suggested by Irenæus, a disciple of Polycarp, who had sat at the feet of St. John himself (54); and hence, though Irenæus only refers to it as a 'probable' solution, it may well be supposed to have come down from St. John's own lips: in all which we have what seems not an improbable suggestion, that there may have been in the primitive church an esoteric interpretation of the whole work by its author, but which was destroyed, or allowed to perish, when the church of Rome became universally predominant, because she could not accept it without acknowledging herself to be such as she is here and elsewhere represented. Indeed, some remains of this interpretation may have been embodied in the commentary upon the book by Melito, pastor of the church in Sardis, whence perhaps that work also was destroyed, or allowed to perish (82).

In recapitulation, we have here the symbol of antichristian ecclesiastical power, with special, though by no means exclusive reference to the church of Rome, in which this power has been most perfectly exemplified and most signally illustrated. It rises out of the earth, to signify that it is nothing of a spiritual nature, but belongs altogether to the earthly or worldly life of man. It has the two horns of a lamb, as claiming a spiritual character, and to be derived and held from the Lamb of God, in whose name it is exercised. It speaks as a dragon or serpent, to denote the subtlety of its wisdom, the falsehood of its claims and teachings, that it proceeds from, and is an instrument of, Satan. It exercises all the authority of the former beast, to signify that papal Rome, e. g. would become a temporal princedom, and would exercise all the authority of the antichristian secular powers, especially that of pagan Rome, in persecuting the saints. Thus it caused to be set up an image of pagan Rome, and of its life, so that it could speak and teach, and persecute unto death all who should refuse to reverence and submit to it.

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Thus also the apparently fatal wound, which the persecuting power of pagan Rome had received in the accession to the throne of the first Christian emperor, was healed: persecution was revived and restored to its former activity. This power works great signs to deceive and seduce men to worship the image which it sets up, to signify that papal Rome would work thousands of pretended miracles, and thus would subjugate the minds and consciences of men to her domination, and cause them to reverence and submit to this likeness of pagan Rome in herself. It sets a mark upon men, and prohibits those who have not this mark from buying and selling, and causes them to be put to death, to signify that the church of Rome would claim that none but her own members had any right to live and prosper, and would put those who should strive to emancipate themselves from her authority under ban with respect to life with all its functions and privileges. In fine, the number of this persecuting power is contained in the name of a man the letters of which have the numerical value of 666, and that name is Lateinos, Latin, because this church would call herself by this name and bear it through all the ages; because the Latin would be her sacred language among all nations; and in her the antichristian and persecuting character and spirit of Latin paganism would be restored.

In view of all this, it would seem that it must be plain to every unbiassed mind that, as the former beast is the symbol of antichristian secular power, with special reference to pagan Rome, so this latter is the symbol of antichristian ecclesiastical power, with a like special reference to papal Rome. I at least cannot help being amazed and filled with awe at the vividness and particularity of this wonderful prophecy, and at its no less wonderful fulfilment. I am constrained, whether I would or not, to see in it a marvellous revelation of the foreknowledge of God, and of the plenary inspiration of this book. For although I can conceive that St. John, by the piercing insight and artistic power of his great genius, might have wrought out, in most of its particulars at least, the symbol of the former beast, since he had the persecutions

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of pagan Rome before his eyes, and had suffered them in his own person; yet how he could foresee by any mere human wisdom that this persecuting power would receive an apparently fatal wound; that this wound would be healed, and persecution revived by the church which had suffered so much from it; that she would thus set up and constitute an image of pagan Rome, and cause men to reverence it; that she would prohibit those who should refuse from buying and selling, and would cause them to be put to death; that she would claim to derive her authority for these abominations from the Lamb of God, and would exercise it in His name, who Himself had been crucified by just such persecution, and all whose teachings were one protest against it; that she would support her impious claims by a vast system of lying wonders, by which the minds and consciences of men would be subjugated to her power: and how St. John, by his own foresight, could give the precise number of the name by which she would call herself and be known in all ages and countries: of this I cannot conceive; manifestly it transcends all the natural powers of the human mind; it is the wisdom of God, so revealed that it cannot fail to be recognized by all whose minds are open to the truth. Surely we need no other evidence of the plenary inspiration of this book, nor of the immense importance to all mankind of what it unveils, than that which is given us in this vision of the beast that comes up out of the earth with the horns of a lamb and the speech of a dragon.

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XXX

THE CXLIV THOUSAND ON THE HEAVENLY MOUNT ZION THE CHURCH OF THE SAVED TRIUMPHANT XIV 1–5

This vision, like several others that precede it (229), anticipates the whole result of the Lord's redemptive work, and represents it as it will appear at the close of the dispensation. For here we are given to see those who have been saved out of the world in their glorified heavenly state, celebrating their redemption and salvation: from which point of view the vision takes occasion to describe and emphasize the purity and beauty of their lives while they dwelt upon the earth. Its practical object, as that of several of the following, seems to be the confirmation of the faith and patience of living saints in view of the seven last plagues, which, in the cyclical order of the visions, are yet to come upon the world (228).

1 And I saw, and, behold, the Lamb standing upon Mount Zion, and with Him cxliv thousand, having His name, and the name of His Father, written on their foreheads.

This Mount Zion must be interpreted in accordance with the symbolical character of the book, as being itself a symbol; for that it is not to be understood as the mountain of that name in Jerusalem is evident from the subsequent statement, that the voices of those who here stand upon it are heard 'from heaven.' What it signifies will be evident if we consider the command given to Moses concerning the tabernacle and its furniture: "See, saith He, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was shewed thee in the mount" (Heb. viii. 5); which implies a certain correspond-

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ence between things on earth and things in heaven: also, what St. Paul says concerning 'the Jerusalem that is above, . . which is our mother' (Gal. iv. 26). For in like manner, we have in these visions a heavenly temple, with its sanctuary and Holy of Holies, its altars, and its ark of the covenant, and here, in fine, a heavenly Mount Zion, upon which the temple stands, surrounded by the heavenly Jerusalem. It is here, then, on these heights of the spiritual world, that the Lamb is now seen, with His cxliv thousand (155), the elect of God, the church of the saved, who have been 'sealed with the seal of the living God,' the significance of which has been given (154). In this place, however, we have the additional information, that the inscription on the seal impresses upon their foreheads the names of the Lamb and of His Father; for although but one of these is in our common version, both are found in the best manuscripts. The significance of these names, as sealed upon the foreheads of the saved, is that their spiritual faculties are consecrated and sanctified unto God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and hence their salvation, as in the words of the Lord: "This is eternal life, that they should know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John xvii. 3).

2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of great thunder; and the voice which I heard was as of harpers harping upon their harps: 3 and they sing a new song before the throne, and before the living creatures and the elders; and no one was able to learn the song save the cxliv thousand who were redeemed from the earth.

This is one of the passages which determine that these throned and crowned elders do not represent either the whole or any part of the redeemed church, for this song is not sung by them, but before them (111), also before the living creatures (113). The strange perplexities in which they involve themselves who are driven by their pre-millenarian theory to understand that the cxliv thousand do not sing this song, because they stand on the literal Mount Zion, may be seen in Alford's Commentary *in loco*. For nothing can be plainer to those

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who are not blinded by prejudice than that it is sung by the cxliv thousand to the music of their harps, and that no one else can learn it, because it is a song of thanksgiving and praise for their having been 'redeemed from the earth.' The words, indeed, are not given, but no doubt they are the same in substance with the doxology: "Unto Him that loveth us, and hath washed us from our sins in His blood, and hath made us a kingdom, priests unto God and His Father, unto Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever" (15). Accepting this as the substance of the song of these redeemed souls, we see how it stands in striking contrast with that other 'new song' which we have heard from the elders and living creatures: "Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain in sacrifice, and hast redeemed unto God with thy blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests unto our God, and they reign over the earth." The point of contrast lies between 'us,' in one song, and 'them' in the other; wherein we have other proofs that these elders do not represent the church, and see how consistently the symbolism of the book is preserved. Moreover, that none could learn this song but the cxliv thousand is evidence demonstrative, that they include the whole church of the saved. In fine, it is as the sound of many waters and of great thunder, because it is sung by that 'great multitude which no man could number' (157) who are represented by the cxliv thousand; and it is 'as of harpers harping on their harps,' to denote its joyful festivity.

4 These are they who are not defiled with women, for they are virgins: these are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever He may go: these were redeemed from among men, the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb: 5 and in their mouth was found no guile: they are blameless.

The words, 'are not defiled with women, for they are virgins,' are to be interpreted as symbols, to denote the purity in which the saved have passed their lives on earth: certainly

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not in any disparagement of lawful marriage, as if that sacramental sign of the holiest of all relations, namely, that between the Lord and His Bride the church, could be regarded as in any wise a defilement. Also, they follow the Lamb whithersoever He may go, i. e. their faith in Him is such that they do not strive to know beforehand whither He intends to lead them; they are implicitly submissive and obedient to all His commandments and ordinances; and they conform themselves to the example of His life. No guile or lie is found in their mouths and they are blameless. Of course, these words, as descriptive of the characters of God's people, cannot be taken in an absolute sense, for 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us' (1 John i. 8); but they describe the general tenor of the lives of the followers of the Lamb, otherwise they could not be His followers. For they have been efficaciously redeemed from the corruptions of the worldly life by the sacrifice of Christ: "Ye were redeemed, not with corruptible things, with silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb without blemish and spotless, [even the blood] of Christ" (1 Pet. i. 18–19). But in what sense are they called 'the firstfruits unto God and the Lamb' (157), and elsewhere 'a kind of firstfruits of His creatures' (James i. 18); also, 'the church of the firstborn'? (Heb. xii. 23). In explanation of these peculiar forms of expression it may be said that they are called 'firstborn,' as the followers of Him who is 'the firstborn of all creation' (Col. i. 15), and as the inheritors of the heavenly inheritance, 'heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ' (Rom. viii. 17); and they are 'firstfruits,' as being consecrated to God and holy, in reference also to the palingenesia of the whole creation, or 'restoration of all things' (viii. 19–22), which follows their ingathering.

Some of these traits of moral character ascribed to the followers of the Lamb seem to require our special attention.

1. They live in purity, as regards the seventh commandment. This, indeed, as we have seen, cannot be said of them

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without qualification, yet we must understand that their 'virginity' represents a very different manner of life, with respect to sexual purity, from that which prevails in the world. Yet it is to be feared that there is an increasing laxity in this particular among professed Christians, as there certainly is in society at large; than which nothing can be more inconsistent with true piety, or more destructive of human welfare in general. The enormous increase of divorces of late, often for trivial causes, is one of the most alarming signs of the times (68); in respect to which, as in all morality, Christian society ought to be eminently distinguished from that of the world. For it is essential to everything worthy of the name of piety, that it should keep itself untainted with the lusts of the flesh, and be characterized by true 'chastity in heart, speech, and behavior.' Parents, therefore, cannot be too careful for their children in this matter, especially with respect to their reading; for many of the books which are commonly regarded as harmless are interesting to young people chiefly from their vivid portrayal of the relations and affections between the sexes. By the reading of such books these affections are quickened, and often prematurely developed and brought into exercise; whereas, for the health of the young, both moral and physical, they should be kept, as much as possible, in abeyance, until life is well matured, and the conscience has come to assert its divine authority. Sabbath-school superintendents and teachers also have a great responsibility here; for very much in the literature of their libraries is doing immense harm from the mere fact, that it consists of love stories, which, however free from impurity, are nothing less than spiritual poison to children and very young people. No mere love story, though ever so proper in itself, should ever be admitted into a Sabbath-school library: better no library at all; for by such reading the Lord's little ones are caused to offend, their pure life is corrupted and defiled, through the agency of those whose most imperative duty it is to shelter and protect them from the evil that is in the world.

2. Another characteristic moral trait of those who shall

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come to stand on the heavenly Mount Zion is, that they are without guile and blameless, i. e. they are simple-minded, sincere, honest, and frank-spoken, so that they give no just cause of offence or blame. For guile is deceit for some malignant or selfish object, and hence it always gives just cause of offence to those upon whom it is practiced. He who deceives another by word or deed with any such intent; who appraises what he would sell, or depreciates what he would buy, beyond the truth; who pays hypocritical compliments to those whom he despises; or who in any way perverts the truth for a malignant or selfish purpose; he practices guile, and thereby becomes a child of 'the old serpent,' who 'beguiled' our first mother to the original sin, which

> Brought death into the world and all our woe.

With deep significance, therefore, guile may be called the root of all sin.

3. Still another trait of those who shall come to stand on this Mount is, that 'they follow the Lamb whithersoever He may go': they do not put a difference between some of His commands and others, and they accept His example as valid for them. They do not say or think, Lord, thou hast commanded us to be sober and truthful and honest, and we strive to obey; but, as for thy commands to confess thee before men, and to observe thy sacramental ordinances, these we are not prepared to obey: we wait, and thou, Lord, must wait till we are better prepared: as if it were possible, by present disobedience, to become better prepared for future obedience! Neither do they say or think, Oh, He was God; we cannot be expected to follow His example, to live as He lived: but they believe in Him, as a man, who 'was tempted in all points like as we are' (Heb. iv. 15), as the legitimate model and exemplar of Christian life.

Such is the life in this world of those whose voices shall be heard on the heavenly Mount Zion, as the sound of many waters and of great thunder, whilst they sing this new song to the music of 'the harps of God' (Rev. xv. 2), which none can learn but themselves. And he who would sing it there

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must learn to sing it here. He who would be pure there must be pure here. He who would be without guile there must be without guile here. He that would be blameless there must be blameless here. He that would follow the Lamb there must follow Him here whithersoever He may go. If we fail in this, we fail of salvation; for 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord' (Heb. xii. 14).

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XXXI

THE ANGEL OF THE EVERLASTING GOSPEL THE GOSPEL PREACHED UNTO ALL NATIONS XIV 6–7

In this vision we have a symbolical representation of the Lord's prophecy: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a testimony unto all the nations (Mat. xxiv. 14). The gospel must first be preached unto all the nations. . . . And then shall the end come" (Mark xiii. 10). It contains some very interesting particulars, and affords us a suitable occasion to consider the ministry of angels, especially in this universal preaching of the gospel.

6 And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell upon the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people, 7 saying with a great voice, Fear God, and give glory unto Him, for the hour of His judgment is come, and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountains of waters.

This angel flies in midheaven, like the eagle of a former vision, that his great voice may be heard by all mankind (179). The two-fold enumeration of four particulars here, i. e. with respect to the population of the earth and to the created universe, recalls the symbolical meaning of this number, that of the whole world, or universality (114). The 'everlasting' or 'eternal gospel' is without the definite article in the Greek, which raises the question, whether it is to be understood as the gospel in the common acceptation of the word, or as some special glad tidings concerning the end of the world. Commentators are much divided on this point, but probably both ideas are included. For it is

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expressly given as a part of the angel's message, that 'the hour of God's judgment has come,' and this is joyful news, as where it is said in a former vision: "In the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he must sound his trumpet, the mystery of God should be finished, as He declared the glad tidings to His servants the prophets" (199). And that this message includes the gospel, properly so called, though with special reference to the end, i. e. to the final establishment of the Lord's kingdom, and the predicted triumph of good over evil in this world, will be evident from the following considerations: (1) There never was, nor ever can be, but one 'everlasting' or 'eternal' gospel, upon which here a strong emphasis is evidently laid. Other glad tidings, of course, there might be, whether pertaining to the coming of the kingdom, or to other matters; but nothing that did not contain the very heart, substance, and object of the gospel of Christ could, with any propriety, be so called. (2) What the angel has to declare and publish is for 'them that dwell upon the earth . . every nation and tribe and tongue and people'; wherein it agrees with the Lord's command: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15). (3) The angel's message, 'Fear God, and give glory unto Him, for the hour of His judgment is come, and worship Him,' expresses the substance and object of the whole gospel, and of the word of God from beginning to end, but here with evident allusion to the words: "[This is] the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole [duty or well-being] of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, and every hidden thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ec. xii. 13–14). Thus we see that the great voice of this angel, sounding in the ears of all the dwellers upon earth, and commanding them to fear and worship and give glory to God, is significant of the very heart and object of the everlasting gospel. 'The heaven and the earth and the sea and the fountains of waters' may be taken here both in their literal and symbolical import, as representing, in the latter sense the source of light, the

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natural life of man (153), his national organizations (174), and all the sources and supplies of his spiritual life (175). For everything in the creation, providence, and word of God has this practical object, that men should fear and worship, obey and glorify Him. All created things, all events, all truths, all doctrines are means unto this end. The incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, the gift of the Holy Spirit, the church and sacraments, the preaching of the gospel, all God's judgments and providential dealings with the children of men, cannot be otherwise comprehended than as means unto the end of bringing them back from their wanderings in ignorance, idolatry, and immorality to the knowledge, worship, and obedience of the one only living and true God. And it is very necessary that we should sometimes withdraw our attention from particular doctrines, and fix it upon this paramount practical object, as it is here presented to our view; otherwise we may easily lose sight of it, as often it has been lost sight of, in the multitude of the means which it employs, many of which are of absorbing interest. In fine, the all-constraining motive which this angel presses upon us to enforce his preaching is, that the hour of God's judgment is come, when He will render to every man according to his deeds, which, indeed, is the subject of the whole book (18).

Thus we see that what is symbolized in this vision is the great evangelizing or missionary work of the church (199), as running on to the close of the dispensation, just as it is presented by our Lord Himself in His declaration: "Then shall the end come" (267). And the rapid advance and glorious success of this work in our time ought surely to be taken as one of the signs of the approaching consummation; for if it should continue to advance with constantly accelerated speed, as in the last twenty years, it cannot be long before the prophecy of this vision shall be amply fulfilled. When we consider what is now going on in the islands of the Pacific Ocean, in Africa, Turkey, Persia, India, Siam, China, and Japan, we can almost see this great angel in his flight through midheaven, and hear his 'great voice' pro-

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claiming to all the dwellers upon earth, that they shall 'fear God, and give glory unto Him, and worship Him, for the hour of His judgment is come.'

But what, then, we must now enquire, have angels to do with the preaching of the gospel unto mankind? For the solution of this question we must recall here the name of this book, the Unveiling, and that it is so named because it withdraws the veil from the invisible world, and discloses to our view those spiritual agencies and transactions from which all that takes place in this world proceeds, and of which it is, as it were, the shadow or echo (3). Thus, where otherwise we should see only the great missionary work of the church, we have here unveiled an angelic agency within, under, behind it, or howsoever it might be expressed, giving it impetus, urging it on to its consummation. For this angel flying in midheaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach, and actually preaching it to all the world, can signify nothing less, I think, than that the missionary work of the church is a matter of the deepest interest to the holy angels; that they have a mighty agency in it; that they have much to do in opening the doors of nations and peoples to the gospel; that they watch over the Holy Scriptures to preserve them from corruption, and to cause them to be faithfully translated into all the different languages, and diffused among all the nations of mankind; and that much of what we commonly ascribe immediately to God is due rather to their intermediate agency. One thing at least is plain, that the holy angels are deeply interested in the missionary work, and that in it we have their fullest sympathy and active co-operation. Beyond this I cannot go with certainty, for I do not think this symbol requires us to believe that it is under the supervision or control of any one particular angel, though I would by no means deny that it may be.

All this leads us to notice here something which runs through the whole Scripture, namely, that angels have much to do with human affairs. What is taught us on this subject may be epitomized as follows: There are good and bad angels, and both are immensely numerous.

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1. Bad angels were once good, but they fell from their holy and happy estate by the sin of pride, i. e. by trusting to and following their own wisdom, instead of the wisdom of God, in the distinction and choice between good and evil, which is the Scriptural meaning of pride, and which, in a deeper sense than guile (265), is necessarily the primary root of all sin.* They are bitter, malignant enemies of God and man and of the holy angels. Their power is very great, and it is all employed in doing evil, especially to men. They tempt men to sin in order to involve them in perdition. One of them, under the form of a serpent, was the original tempter of our first parents, and 'beguiled' them by the subtlety of his temptations; for his wisdom is the wisdom of subtlety. He drew other angels into transgression, and has authority over them (236). He is called their king, the angel of the abyss, Satan or adversary, the devil or slanderer, the accuser, the tempter, the dragon, the old serpent, the prince of this world, the prince of the power of the air, Beëlzebub, a liar, the father of lying, a murderer from the beginning, and by other names and titles of like evil significance. He tempted Job, Ananias and Sapphira, Simon Magus, and the Lord Himself; in whose time, perhaps also before and since, these bad angels entered into men, possessed their bodies and minds, and produced epilepsy, paralysis, insanity, and other distressing maladies of soul and body. Sometimes they are employed as executioners of the divine judgments. No atonement has been made for them, and their final destiny is to be shut up in hell and tormented forever in 'the fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels' (Mat. xxv. 41).

2. Good angels surround the throne of God and worship Him and His Christ. They were the guardians and ministers of His humanity while He tabernacled in the flesh. They ministered to Him in His great temptation in the wilderness and in His agony in Gethsemane, and they minister to His people, the 'heirs of salvation.' They are God's

* See *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, vi.

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messengers, and bring His messages to men, as at the giving of the law from Mount Sinai, at the birth of Christ, and in the visions of the prophets. They will act as the ministers of the Lord in the last judgment. They preside, in some sort, over the destinies of nations; one of them being called 'the prince of Israel,' another 'the prince of Persia,' another 'the prince of Grecia' (Dan. x. 20–21), though all these do not seem to have been good angels. They are ministers and executioners of national and individual judgments, as in the case of the angel who stood over Jerusalem, with a drawn sword in his hand to punish King David and his people for his sin in numbering them (2 Sam. xxiv. 16). They conduct the souls of the pious dead to their appointed place, as Lazarus was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom (Luke xvi. 22). In fine, an eminent commentator, from whose work the preceding summary is mostly taken, has left us the following on this subject: "I can conceive of no more magnificent and ennobling view of the Creator and Lord of all things than that which regards Him as delighting to multiply, even to an almost boundless extent, beings in His own image, and therefore rational and moral like Himself. . . . To make Him the only real agent in the universe, and all else the mere passive recipients of His influence, is to represent Him as the master of a magnificent puppet show, all of which He manages by merely pulling the wires with His own hands, and to take from Him the glory which results from the creation of numberless beings in His own image, beings which reflect the brightness of their great original. . . . It is this intelligent and rational creation in which John lives and moves and thinks and speaks. The universe, as viewed by him, is filled with ministers swift to do Jehovah's will. They stand before His throne; they preside over nations. . . . He sees the angels of the Lord encamping round about all them that fear Him. Such is the universe as unveiled by the Seer of the Apocalypse."

Finally, we are admonished by this great angel flying in midheaven, and with His great voice proclaiming this message to all mankind, that we should conform our lives to

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the gospel which he preaches: that we fear God, hold Him in reverence and awe: that we reverence His holy names, word, commandments, ordinances, providence, and all things whereby He makes Himself known: that we stand in awe of His judgments, and give Him the glory which is His due, as the Creator and Lord of heaven, and them that dwell therein; of the earth and man, in all the organs and functions of his natural life; of the sea and all its creatures, and of all man's national and municipal organizations; of the fountains of waters, and of all the sources and supplies of our spiritual life: that we render unto Him the worship and service which, as our Creator, Preserver, and Saviour, He justly claims, and which we cannot refuse without setting at naught all the obligations which bind us to Him, especially those of His grace and love. All this we are here admonished to do for the urgent reason, that the hour of His judgment is come, is very near to us, when He will judge the world in righteousness, and render to every one according to his works. Let us, then, ask ourselves, each for himself, What is my relation to this gospel? Does it save me? Or does it leave me in my sins? Do I fear God and keep His commandments and ordinances? Do I worship Him and give Him the glory which is His due? For if we fail in this, His judgment, that is, His justice, must surely and speedily be executed upon us, and there can be no deliverance from its claims.

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XXXII

PRE-ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE FALL OF BABYLON JUDGMENT UPON THE GREAT ANTICHRISTIAN WORLD-POWER XIV 8

Babylon is another symbol of the great antichristian world-power, the same that has been previously designated as 'the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also the Lord was crucified' (221). The symbol runs through several of the subsequent visions, and is evidently one of the most important in the book. Here the fall of this power is simply preannounced, on account of the vast importance of what it signifies: full particulars of it will be given hereafter; and perhaps none of these revelations has a deeper practical interest.

8 And another, a second angel followed, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great, who hath made all the nations to drink of the wine of the rage of her fornication.

This angel is 'a second' with reference to the one immediately preceding, whom he follows in flight through mid-heaven, proclaiming his prophetic message with a like great voice, no doubt, that all the earth may hear (267). A third will follow still in this sky-picture, the sublimity of which can hardly fail to strike every one.

In order the more clearly and fully to comprehend what is signified by the symbol of Babylon in these visions, we shall have to recall here some particulars concerning the city which bore this name, and the vast empire which it governed. It seems to have been founded by Nimrod, who was of the posterity of Ham, the rebellious son of Noah (Gen. x. 8–12),

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either on the site, or in the immediate neighborhood of the tower of Babel; in connection with which we have the post-diluvian world represented as in rebellion against God, and His judgment upon that rebellion (xi. 1–9). In the old Accadian or Hamitic language of its original inhabitants, as recovered in the cuneiform inscriptions, the name Babel is said to signify the High Gate, which is precisely equivalent to the Sublime Porte, by which the Turkish government at Constantinople is known to this day; a striking instance of the changeless permanence of oriental ideas. Moses, on account of the confounding of language which took place there (Gen. x. 9), seems to have regarded it as a noteworthy coincidence, that in Hebrew it signified confusion. The city of Babylon, for its size, architectural magnificence, wealth, population, and power, was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. At the height of its greatness and splendor, it was visited by several intelligent Greek travellers, whose descriptions of it have come down to us, and do not differ more than might be anticipated from independent eye-witnesses. They inform us that it was built on the river Euphrates, which ran through the midst of the city, and which, at that place, is something less than three-quarters of a mile wide. According to the lowest measurements given, although the author is not so reliable in general as the other whose numbers are the highest, its outer walls were a little less than 42 miles long, which, as it was in the form of a perfect square, would include an area of about 110 square miles. The higher number makes them 60 miles in length, with an area of 225 square miles, more than is contained within the limits of the city of London with its suburbs at the present time. They were built of sun-dried brick, and reached to the enormous height of 300 feet; and they were 90 feet thick, so that three chariots could easily drive abreast of each other on their surface. Moreover, they were surmounted, to what additional height we are not informed, by 250 towers; and there were 100, or, according to the higher number, 150 vast, two-leaved, brazen gates. The streets were very broad, ran at right angles to each other, and, where they led down to the

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river on both banks, there were strong fortifications and similar brazen gates, for defence against attacks by water. The two divisions of the city were connected by a stone bridge roofed in, and by a tunnel under the river. The walls and gates are often mentioned in the prophets:

> Though Babylon should mount up to heaven,
> And though she should fortify the height of her strength, . . .
> The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly overthrown,
> And her high gates shall be burned with fire (Jer. li. 53–58).

The immense area within the walls was not all built up, but land enough was left for cultivation to provide the population with food in case of a protracted siege. In illustration of the wealth and luxury of the city, one of the Greek travellers informs us that it contained "paradises" or gardens upon elevated platforms, to which an adequate depth of soil had been carried up, where all manner of shade and fruit trees and flowers were cultivated by irrigation from the river.

The wealth and luxury and power of the empire of Babylon, which included nearly the whole of western Asia when it was enormously populous, were celebrated throughout the known world. Its history in the Bible, and in many volumes of inscriptions disinterred from the sites of its great cities, runs parallel with that of the people of Israel for nearly a thousand years; during which its constant aim was the subjugation of Palestine, in order to the conquest of Egypt, which was the only rival power that was able to compete with Babylon for the empire of the world. This long conflict resulted at last in what is called the Babylonish captivity: Palestine was conquered and ravaged; Jerusalem was destroyed, and the temple built by Solomon was burned; the people who survived were carried away into a grievous captivity. The providential cause of this immeasurable calamity was the obstinate idolatry, in connection with great moral corruption, into which the covenant people had fallen subsequently to the reign of Solomon, whose pernicious example in the latter years of his life they had followed: it was in

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chastisement for this defection that they were uprooted out of their own holy land, and transplanted to a heathen soil, where, from the grossness of their idolatries and immoralities, they now properly belonged. For they had often been forewarned of this impending judgment, and even of the time, seventy years, during which their captivity should continue (Jer. xxix. 10), but neither this nor anything else could restrain their idolatrous and immoral proclivities. Humanly speaking, indeed, it could hardly have been anticipated that this transplanting to a heathen soil would have had any such purifying consequences; yet it had, for in their captivity they were often compelled to worship the idols and false gods of their loathed masters, and were grievously tormented when they refused. On some of the tablets recovered from the mounds of Mesopotamia we have heart-rending pictures of Hebrews, recognized as such by their strongly-marked national features, suffering these torments, among which that of being flayed alive appears to have been not uncommon. This effectually cured them of their idolatrous itch; for never since, it is said, has a Jew been known to worship an idol, or any other but the God of Israel. Yet the heathen were by no means justified in the infliction of this great national judgment. On the contrary, Babylon thereby brought the judgment of God and ruin upon herself, which is fully represented by the prophets:

Woe to Assur, the rod of mine anger,
The staff in whose hand is mine indignation!
I will send him against a profane nation,
And against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge,
To take the spoil, and to take the prey,
And to tread them down like the mire of the streets.
Howbeit he meaneth not so,
Neither doth his heart think so . . .
Wherefore, it shall come to pass,
That, when the Lord hath performed His whole work upon Mt. Zion and upon Jerusalem,
I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria,
And the glory of his high looks.
For he hath said,
By the strength of my hand have I done it,
And by my wisdom, for I am prudent. . . .

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> And my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the peoples;
> And, as one gathereth eggs that are forsaken,
> Have I gathered all the earth;
> And there was none that moved the wing,
> Or opened the mouth, or chirped (Is. x. 5–14).

For when nations or individuals are thus ravaged, although they may suffer a just punishment, yet God will not fail in due time to punish the ravager.

From all this we can easily understand how it came to pass that Babylon was regarded by the ancient people of God as the great world-power which stood in irreconcilable hostility to the Lord and His kingdom. Hence their prophetic writings are loaded with denunciations of the wrath of God against her, and of her utter destruction. Some of these have been given, others are as follows:

> And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms,
> The beauty of the Chaldean's pride,
> Shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
> It shall never be inhabited,
> Neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation:
> Neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there,
> Neither shall shepherds fold their flocks there:
> But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there;
> And their houses shall be full of doleful creatures;
> And ostriches shall dwell there,
> And satyrs shall dance there,
> And howling creatures shall cry in their castles,
> And jackals in the pleasant palaces (Is. xiii. 19–22).
> And Babylon shall become heaps [mounds] (Jer. li. 37).

These are only examples of whole pages of prophecies, which were delivered and recorded when Babylon was at the height of her prosperity and glory: and how they have been fulfilled to the letter is known to all men; for her former site is nothing now but mounds, formed by the crumbling and falling-in of her enormous buildings of sun-dried brick, and the gathering of the dust of ages from the desert; the surrounding country is a desolation, which the wandering Arab is afraid to approach, because he regards it as haunted ground. And they had been thus fulfilled centuries before the visions of the Apocalypse were received: consequently,

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as the prophecy of this vision necessarily refers to what was then in the future, it cannot be understood of the literal Babylon, but must be interpreted according to the symbolical character of the book, as foreshadowing the overthrow of the great antichristian world-power which, through all the ages, has stood in hostile relations to the church and kingdom of God analogous to those which the city and empire of Babylon bore to Palestine and Israel. Thus we see that Babylon in this and subsequent visions is identical, as has been said with 'the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt' (221): and one reason for these various names doubtless is to emphasize their symbolical character and meaning. For in all these places the Lord's people fell into captivity and bondage to the world: in Sodom, for when Lot separated from Abraham, and chose as his dwelling-place the corrupt cities of the plain, it was from worldly motives, on account of the fertility of the country; and hence all his posterity were destroyed in their overthrow, or subsequently identified with the heathen world: in Egypt, for there the covenant people were subjected to a long and cruel bondage, which is one of the most significant Old Testament types of the subjection of the church to the world: but the grandest of these types is that of the Babylonish captivity; and hence Babylon is the symbolical name for this great antichristian world-power which in these visions predominates over all others.

The absolute certainty of the destruction of this antichristian power is expressed in the prophetic past tense, the force of which is, that what is predicted is as certain as if it had already taken place; and this is still further emphasized by repetition: "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." The reason given for her destruction is, that 'she has made all the nations to drink of the wine of the rage of her fornication.' For the spirit of worldliness is the prevailing form of corruption in mankind. This is the 'covetousness which is idolatry' (Col. iii. 5); and this earthly greed is here represented under the loathsome image of fornication into which Babylon has drawn all the nations. Other great world cities are

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similarly characterized, as in the following passage concerning Nineveh: "Woe to the bloody city. . . . Because of the multitude of the harlotries of the well favored harlot, the mistress of witchcrafts, that selleth nations through her harlotries" (Nahum iii. 1–4); and the following concerning Tyre: "She will return to her hire, and will play the harlot with all the kingdoms of the world" (Is. xxiii. 17). The idea is, that the world-power seduces mankind into luxury, idolatry, and impurity. This moral corruption, moreover, becomes a 'rage,' or form of insanity, which corrupts the faculties of the mind and soul, and renders filthy all sacred things, as excess of wine deprives men of reason, and sexual impurity defiles their spiritual nature. In these forms of expression also there is a plain allusion to the following:

> Babylon hath been a golden cup in the Lord's hand,
> That made all the nations drunken:
> The nations have drunk of her wine,
> Therefore the nations are mad (Jer. li. 7).

But these images of fornication and harlotry have their deepest significance in application to the church when she becomes corrupted by the world; when she falls into the idolatry of earthly and perishable things, and governs her life by worldly wisdom rather than by the wisdom of God. Then it is that she drinks of the wine of the rage of spiritual fornication and adultery by forsaking her celestial Spouse, and submitting herself to the embraces of the world. This idea is much insisted on in the prophets, and in order to give it a more copious development in connection with this symbol, Babylon, as we shall see in a subsequent vision, becomes a harlot woman, decked with all meretricious ornaments, and riding upon the beast of antichristian political power.

This illicit connection always brings the church into bondage to the world, as now we see in the general conformity of professed Christians to its customs and morality and in almost their whole manner of life: in their fashions, amusements, and extravagant expenditure; in their rage for the acquisition of worldly wealth; in the numerous defalcations and frauds committed by church members; but above all,

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in that we have no public opinion within the church independent of and superior to that of the world (68). For surely the people of God, whose citizenship is in heaven, ought not to be governed by the opinions of 'the world that lieth in wickedness' (1 John v. 19). Surely we, as Christians, ought to have a public opinion among ourselves, with respect to our whole manner of living, independent of and superior to that of the world; by which the feeble ones might be supported, guided, and comforted in the life to which we are all called of crucifixion and death to the world, and of whole-hearted consecration to the service and glory of our Saviour. Surely the morality of the world is not good enough for those 'who have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb' (160). The prevailing rage for wealth and display ought surely to be an abomination to all Christians, as it must be in the sight of God; nor can it be right that the sorrows of the world should have such power as they often have to crush our hearts. For the difference between the church and the world in these respects is often so slight that one can hardly tell them apart. In all this we have the fruits of that bondage of the church to the world which was typified by that of Lot in Sodom, of the covenant people in Egypt, and by their captivity in Babylon.

In these grand historic types, moreover, we have represented the fearful loss which the church suffers from this bondage, her need of deliverance from it, and the object for which, together with the means by which, she is finally delivered. For Lot, by separating himself from Abraham to dwell in the cities of the plain, alienated his posterity from all the promises and blessings of the covenant people; and in the destruction of Sodom, he lost all his family except two of his daughters, who seem to have become so corrupted that, humanly speaking, it would have been better if they too had perished. In like manner, the bondage in Egypt became such at last as threatened the moral and spiritual ruin of the Old Testament church, and even her utter extinction by the cutting off of her male children (Ex. i. 22). The great lesson of this type is, that by subjection and

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conformity of the church to the world she loses her children; they wander away from her communion, and become identified with the world, as we see in thousands of instances. Indeed, it cannot be doubted but that, if she had kept her children, as in the martyr age, when it was as certain that the children of Christians would be Christians as that the children of Jews would be Jews, her numbers would by this time have exceeded that of all other religions. But the loss which the church suffers by this bondage is most fully represented by the captivity in Babylon, from which only a very small remnant ever returned; all the rest, including ten out of the twelve tribes, having been swallowed up by the world, so that nothing has ever been heard of them to this day. And the object for which the captives were at length delivered was, that they might devote themselves wholly to the service of God, which they were not free to do under their Egyptian and Babylonish masters (Ex. ix. 1). Moreover, in all these cases, deliverance came at last by the most fearful judgments upon the world-powers: by the destruction of Sodom; by the plagues upon Egypt, including the slaughter of the first-born, and the overthrow of Pharaoh's host in the Red Sea; by the capture of Babylon, and the subversion of her empire, when it passed to the Medes and Persians under Cyrus the great, who set free the children of the captivity. And thus, as predicted in these types and in all the prophetic Scriptures on this subject, deliverance from subjection and bondage to the world will come to the church of these last times; i. e. by such judgments upon the world-power as are typified by the destruction of Sodom, the Egyptian plagues, and the overthrow of Babylon; and such as will make the Lord's people to know that they cannot continue to identify themselves with the world, nor drink of the maddening cup of its fornication, without perishing with it. Yet, for those who are the true people of God, this deliverance is sure to come at last; for the assurance of it is given by this angel flying in midheaven, and proclaiming with his great voice, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great,' and in the subsequent visions, where her overthrow and utter destruction are particularly

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described, and where the church comes forth out of her, as the free and honored 'wife of the Lamb' (Rev. xviii. 4), as 'a bride adorned for her husband' (xxi. 10).

But surely this deliverance will not come until the church shall be made to know that she is in bondage, and to feel it as an intolerable burden, and groan under it, and cry mightily unto God for His interposition and the outstretching of His almighty arm in her behalf. For Lot could not be delivered from Sodom until he was 'sore distressed by the lascivious life of the wicked; for that righteous man, dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, tormented his righteous soul from day to day with their lawless deeds' (2 Pet. ii. 7–8); then the angel of the Lord came down, and drew him out of the city from its impending destruction. So, also, there was no deliverance from the bondage in Egypt, until the people had come to feel that it was intolerable, and cried unto God for His interposition, when His plagues fell upon their oppressors, and set them free. In like manner, the exiles in Babylon could not return to rebuild their holy city and temple, until their captivity had become so grievous as to render abominable to their souls the idolatry which had brought it upon them. Hence the overthrow of this great antichristian world-power, of which Sodom and Egypt and Babylon are the apocalyptic symbols, and which now dominates in the church, is not to be expected, until she shall come to groan under her bondage, and cry day and night unto God for deliverance, having attained to some adequate appreciation of the apostle's warning: "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John ii. 15). For in the judgment of charity, what multitudes of professed Christians must these words exclude! But when their full meaning shall come to be realized; when this judgment upon Babylon shall be executed; then Lot will flee out of Sodom, nor be tempted afterwards to drink of the wine of incest with his own daughters; then the Israel of God will go forth out of Egypt, not to set up golden calves, but to devote themselves wholly to his service; then the exiles in Babylon will return to rebuild their holy city and temple, which will never more be profaned by the idolatry of the world,

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XXXIII

PRE-ANNOUNCEMENT OF JUDGMENT UPON THE WORSHIPPERS OF THE BEAST UPON THE CHURCH CORRUPTED BY THE WORLD XIV 9–12

This terrible vision has a close connection with the preceding, and a still closer one with that in which antichristian ecclesiastical power is symbolized as the beast out of the earth (252): for its main object is to show that the worshippers of that beast, and of the image which it causes to be set up in the likeness of the former one (254), i. e. those in the church who have been fatally corrupted by the world, do perish with it. Hence the vision includes, though in a subordinate manner, the judgment and punishment of the ungodly world.

9 And another angel, a third, followed them, saying with a great voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive [the] mark on his forehead, or on his hand, 10 he also shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mingled strong in the cup of His indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone before the holy angels and before the Lamb: 11 and the smoke of their torment goeth up forever and ever; and they have no rest by day or by night who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. 12 Here is the patience of the saints, who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

This angel is a 'third' with reference to the two that have preceded him in his flight through midheaven, i. e. the angel of the everlasting gospel (267), and the one that has announced the fall of Babylon (274). His great voice has the same significance. This beast is the one that represents antichristian ecclesiastical power, or the church

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fatally corrupted by the world, as is evident from the mention of his mark and his image (255), i. e. the image which he causes to be set up to the former beast (254). Consequently those designated as his worshippers are primarily those who are connected with the church. But that there is here also a secondary reference to the ungodly world appears from the following considerations: (1) From the words, 'he also shall drink,' where 'also' may be taken in the sense, together with Babylon in the preceding vision (274): (2) 'All that dwell upon the earth,' except the true people of God, are caused to worship the former beast, and the image of him (254) which this one sets up: (3) The authority which causes men to worship him is originally that of Satan, who is worshipped by all the earth, with the same exception (247). Thus we have a synthesis, as it were, of the dragon and the beast out of the sea with this one out of the earth, and consequently his worshippers, though primarily church members, must include also the ungodly world; and this view is confirmed by the nature of their punishment, which is in no wise peculiar to worldlings in the church.

This dread punishment, as proclaimed by the angel in his flight through midheaven, is intended to awaken the most solemn attention of all mankind. The utmost powers of human language are taxed to express its severity. For the words which I have rendered 'mingled strong' are literally 'mingled unmixed,' in allusion to wine unmixed with water and mingled with drugs to increase its intoxicating strength. Similar expressions concerning 'the wine of the wrath of God' are frequent in the prophets, of which the following is an example: "For thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto me:

> Take the cup of the wine of this fury at my hand,
> And cause all the nations to whom I send thee to drink it:
> And they shall drink and reel to and fro and be mad,
> Because of the sword that I will send among them" (Jer. xxv. 15–16).

Doubtless they are all highly figurative, yet this does by no means detract from their significance or force, but, on the contrary, greatly increases it. For figures of speech are

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mostly resorted to where literal expressions would be feeble and inadequate: and the intense energy of such figures may be evinced by the following from a great master of language, where, in order to express the enormous devastation wrought by the northern barbarians in southern Europe, he says, 'The Goth ravened,' thus, by one word, comparing it to that of an army of lions, or other beasts of prey, let loose upon human settlements. Here, then, as everywhere else, the wrath and indignation of God, and the torment of fire and brimstone, are figures of speech, which are resorted to because no literal expressions can adequately set forth the dread reality: and the questions which they force upon every sincere seeker after the truth are, What do they signify? What impressions are they intended to make upon our minds? What is that dread reality which is adequate to justify their use? Of course, the wrath and indignation of God are intended to express with the utmost possible energy His justice, i. e. His personal opposition to, and abhorrence of all sin and wrong, and His unalterable determination to punish them, where they are found incorrigible, as they deserve: that which is as much more to be feared than the rage of a man as God's omnipotence exceeds human power. It is further compared to undiluted and drugged wine, to denote that it is to be executed upon the objects of it with the utmost severity, or severity untempered with mercy; and the effects of such wine are taken to represent that derangement of the faculties of the soul which this maddening torment produces. To all this are added the images of fire and brimstone; and can these be reasonably understood to signify anything less than a torment of inconceivable severity, as intolerable to the immortal soul as these substances would be to the body? Otherwise would not these images, both here and as employed by our Lord in the Gospels (Mat. xxv. 41), be altogether unjustifiable? This punishment, moreover, is to be inflicted 'before the holy angels and before the Lamb'; which signifies that they, however much they may deplore and lament over it, as the Lord wept over Jerusalem, do yet approve of it as most just and necessary.

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But, as if all this were not enough, and as if in answer to such agonizing questions as the following: Does this punishment imply a state of self-conscious torment? How long will it continue? May we not hope that at some time it will come to an end, either by the restoration or annihilation of the lost? we have these points set in the clearest light: (1) For here it is unmistakably represented as a state of self-conscious torment by the words, 'they have no rest by day or by night'; and this is confirmed by our Lord's declaration, seven times repeated in the Gospels, and, no doubt, with the full symbolical significance of this mystical number (14): "There shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Mat. xiii. 42); also, by His showing us a soul in hell, and causing us to hear his voice crying out, 'I am tormented in this flame' (Luke xvi. 19–31), and pleading for a drop of water to cool his tongue. (2) As to the duration of this punishment, it is to continue 'forever and ever,' words which are frequently used in this book to signify the time during which God will possess power and glory (16), and even the length of His life (115). In like manner, our Lord calls it an 'everlasting' or 'eternal punishment.' We need not, however, lay any particular stress upon these or any other single expressions, which, of course, have different meanings in different connections; for that this punishment will never come to an end rests chiefly on other evidence, some of which may be stated as follows: In all that our Lord says upon the subject, and He says a good deal, there is not a single word that can be fairly understood as intended to give us one ray of hope for the lost; certainly not the faintest intimation that they can ever be restored to holiness or happiness. In a late conversation with an eminent clergyman, who was trying to comfort himself concerning them, I called his attention to this fact, which he frankly admitted; and I added, If your Lord does not give you any hope for them, He does not intend you to have any; to which my friend seemed finally to give his assent. (3) The question concerning the annihilation of the lost is sufficiently answered in the preceding statements, to which, however, it may be added, that it is incon-

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sistent, of course, with the immortality of the soul, which gives to the distinction between right and wrong its deepest significance and most solemn sanction, and thus constitutes the moral strength of human nature. Hence, if words be not used at random in the New Testament, nay, be it reverently spoken, with intent to deceive, the condition of lost souls must be understood to be that of self-conscious and hopeless torment.

But some may, and many do say, This is too horrible for belief; and it is inconsistent with the character of God, especially with His infinite compassion and tenderness for sinners as revealed in Christ. For it is inconceivable that He who gave His only begotten Son to die for us all, and that while we were in rebellion against Him, should consign any of us to such a punishment as this. Surely those revelations of His inmost heart which come to us through our Lord Jesus must be understood to overrule, or set aside, or somehow to mitigate, these declarations concerning the punishment of the lost. In answer to all such objections as these, let it be carefully observed that, however glad we might be to find what is elsewhere declared on this subject mitigated, or even superseded, by the Lord's own words, the fact is, as we have just seen, that He himself reiterates over and over again the strongest declarations of the severity and hopelessness of the future punishment that are to be found anywhere in the whole Scripture. Such, in addition to those that have been given, are the following: "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Mat. x. 28). Yea, I say unto you, fear Him (Luke xii. 4–5). When the Son of Man shall come in His glory . . . . then will He say unto them on His left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels (Mat. xxv. 31–41). And these shall go away into everlasting punishment (xxv. 46). In the end of the world, the angels shall come forth, and shall sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (xii. 49–50). Now

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we know nothing of the compassion or character of God beyond what Christ has revealed, and all such revelations must be understood in harmony with these His own declarations. Moreover, if we believe in Him, we must believe what He tells us explicitly on this subject, no less than on all others. It is insane folly to select out of His teachings what may chance to please us, and reject, or explain away, whatever we would gladly have otherwise. This is not to believe in Him, but to mock Him. The question for us is not, whether this, or anything else, be a pleasing or painful doctrine, not whether it be probable or improbable to our minds, but simply, whether He teaches it, or not. If He teaches it, we must believe it; we cannot reject it without giving up our faith in Him. Consequently it is worse than in vain for us to say that humanity recoils from this doctrine, for this is to claim for ourselves more humanity than He had. Humanity recoils at His crucifixion, and at a thousand other facts and truths which we would gladly have otherwise. If He teaches this doctrine, then it is true and most just and humane and necessary to be believed. For aught that we can tell, it may be necessary to the awakening, confirmation, and purification of His elect people (78), and for the restraint of crime upon earth, so that it should be habitable. Who can tell how many souls it has awakened, and driven to seek refuge in Christ, where only refuge can be found, from this tempest of fire and brimstone which is to come upon the ungodly world. The great St. Augustine himself informs us, that it was the fear of future punishment which first brought him to conviction of the enormity of his sins. For that sin, as it is viewed by God and the Lamb and the holy angels, merits and is justly punished with such awful severity, reveals its enormity more impressively than were otherwise possible. Apart from this revelation it may be that no human soul would ever be saved: and it may be equally necessary to the final confirmation of the saints, so that they shall never fall away from their heavenly state, as so many of the angels fell in Satan's rebellion.

The closing words of the vision, 'Here is the patience of the saints, who keep the commandments of God and the

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faith of Jesus' (250), may be understood as an admonition to the people of God, (1) that they are to exercise patient endurance under the trials of faith which are inseparable from this doctrine, and from such execution of the divine justice; (2) that the only way in which they themselves can be saved is by persistently keeping the commandments of God, and what Christ teaches upon this subject, as upon all others. And this admonition is at least as necessary for us as it was for the primitive Christians. We, therefore, are to give no heed to those immoral speculations which are now so rife, by which errorists would persuade us that we have little to fear from the justice of God, whether we keep His commandments and the true faith, or not. We are to put our whole trust for our knowledge of the truth upon this subject, as upon all others pertaining to God and the spiritual world, in the teaching and authority of Christ. We must not allow ourselves to be beguiled by the subtle conceits of man's wisdom, howsoever disguised under pretensions to vindicate the character of God, for He is not incompetent to vindicate His own character; but we are steadfastly to believe that whatsoever the Lord teaches is the truth of God; that all things are as He represents them; especially that justice is no less essential to God's character than love itself; and that what His justice requires in the punishment of sin can be learned only from Himself. For thus only can we ourselves be saved; and thus only can we be animated to labor and pray and make sacrifice, as Christ and His apostles did, for the salvation of those who are hastening down to hell fast as the moments fly. It is to be feared that there is a great falling away in the church of the present day from this truth of the faith of Jesus, that the unsaved do 'go away into everlasting punishment'; for this would go far to explain the feebleness of our efforts to save them, and the superficial piety and worldliness in the church which are now so common. For the burden of souls does not seem to lie upon our hearts, as it did upon the hearts of Christ and of Paul and of the first disciples, and as it must do in order to anything worthy of the name of sacrifice to save them. Hence they perish in their sins through our unbelief.

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XXXIV

A VOICE FROM HEAVEN ANNOUNCING THE BLESSED ESTATE OF THE PIOUS DEAD XIV 13

This revelation seems to have been given for the purpose of counteracting certain deleterious errors which it was foreseen would extensively prevail in the church, particularly errors with respect to the state of the pious dead, in order that the true people of God might be put on their guard against them. It also has a close connection, as we shall see, with the preceding vision.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth; yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their works do follow them.

This voice, as we are expressly informed, is that of 'the Spirit'; and I think this is the only place in the whole Scripture where He, in distinction from the other Persons of the Holy Trinity, is heard to speak in an audible voice from heaven. Here, therefore, we have the clearest and most explicit revelation of His distinct personality. The reason why He thus speaks here probably is, that He, as the sanctifier and heavenly comforter of the Lord's people, and as abiding in them in vital union, is, in some sort, a partaker of their life, and is experimentally acquainted with the blessedness with which He fills their souls. This blessedness consists partly in that 'they rest from their labors,' from all their laborious service, and all their earthly trials and sorrows; and partly in that 'their works,' those that they have done in the former life through the Spirit 'working in them both to will and to do' (Phil. ii. 13), do 'follow them' into

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the eternal world, as imperishable riches, 'a treasure laid up in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal' (Mat. vi. 20). The meaning of the word ἀπαρτί, 'from henceforth,' is not plain. If this rendering be retained, it may be understood in the sense, from the time when the pious depart out of this life, i. e. their blessedness commences immediately. In view of the acknowledged difficulty, however, I venture to suggest another translation; for in classical Greek this word has only three meanings: the first is 'completely,' the second 'wholly,' which is hardly another; and all its derivatives and compounds contain the idea of completeness or perfection. The last meaning of all is that of its etymology, 'from now,' or 'henceforth.' If we take it here in its primary sense, which is commonly to be preferred where the connection will bear it, we shall have the rendering, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord perfectly'; the last word being connected with 'Blessed,' and so placed for emphasis, that it may linger upon the ear. It must be admitted, however, that this is not commonly, if it all, the New Testament meaning of the word.

In order now to understand the object of this declaration from heaven concerning the blessedness of the pious dead, we must recall the last vision, that of judgment upon those in the church who have become fatally corrupted by the world, especially its closing admonition to the saints, that they patiently 'keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.' For it is quite evident that even true Christians in this life do very imperfectly keep these commandments and this faith (263); often they die in a state of very imperfect faith and sanctification. Hence the question naturally arises in every mind, What becomes of them immediately after they have departed out of this life? Do they remain for a time imperfectly saved, undergoing further purification, before they enter into the crowning reward of perfect beatitude? In other words, is there a purgatory for those who die in the Lord, where they remain for a time, until they are purified from all their sins? And this ques-

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tion is closely connected with another, which is now coming to be agitated in the bosom of the Protestant Church: Is there a future state of probation for those who die in their sins, especially for those who in this life have never heard of Christ? It seems to have been in foresight of the former question more particularly, and of the many immoral errors connected with it, that this voice of the Spirit came from heaven, giving solemn assurance that there is no such future state of imperfect sanctification and imperfect beatitude, and that they who die in the Lord are perfectly blessed, and consequently are without sin, as soon as they leave this world. And this assurance is given by the Spirit because He is the efficient agent in their sanctification.

The great error which is opposed to this blessed truth, that 'the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory,' has had a vast range and a most pernicious influence. It is strenuously maintained to this day by the church of papal Rome in her doctrine of Purgatory, and is generally believed throughout her whole communion. She, however, does not much rely upon Scripture to support it, but claims that it has come down by unbroken tradition from the apostles, and that it is thereby, and by her own infallible authority, sufficiently established. It is mostly when arguing with Protestants that Romanists appeal to Scripture, and their proof-texts are now adduced by others in support of the kindred error, that there will be a future state of probation for the heathen who in this life have never heard of Christ, and for all who have not had what they call 'a fair chance' in the matter of their salvation. These texts are the following: "Christ also suffered for sins . . . being put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the Spirit; by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which aforetime were disobedient, when the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water (1 Pet. iii. 18–20). For unto this end was the gospel preached unto the dead, that they might be judged according to men, but might live according to

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God in spirit (iv. 6). Whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come" (Mat. xii. 32). Now it may be conceded that these passages, if the word of God contained nothing else upon the subject of the future punishment, might be understood in the sense of a purgatory and of a probationary state after death. But it is well-nigh incredible that doctrines of such vast moral significance should have been left to be gathered from these three obscure deliverances, two of them in one of the minor Epistles; for nowhere else, except in apocryphal writings, is there anything upon which they can be founded. Our Lord Himself makes not the remotest allusion to them, that is, if we understand what He says about 'the sin that hath never forgiveness' in the obvious sense of a merely emphatic declaration of that truth; to which we are shut up by the fact, that everywhere else He speaks of lost souls as being in an unchangeable state, as, e. g. where He represents such a soul praying to Abraham that its condition may be ameliorated, and being denied in the words of Abraham: "Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that they who would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass from thence to us" (Luke xvi. 26). And as for a purgatory for the imperfectly sanctified, He comforts the dying thief on the cross by assuring him: "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (xxiii. 43). From these and similar declarations, we are placed under a rational necessity to scrutinize the two remaining texts, to see whether they will bear any other meaning than that of a purgatory and a future probationary state. I remember many years ago to have commenced such an examination under a strong prepossession against the common Protestant interpretation, but before I had completed it, I became thoroughly convinced that it was the true one. It is as follows: Christ was raised up from the dead by the Holy Spirit, by which Spirit, in the time of Noah and by Noah's mouth, He preached to them who were then disobedient, and who are now in prison: and for this object was the gospel preached unto them who are now dead, that they

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might repent and be saved; and, if they would not, as they did not, that they might be judged as men to whom the gospel offer of salvation had been made. This interpretation is strongly confirmed by the following considerations: (1) It is given by a great number of the best scholars and commentators, among whom are Leighton, Scaliger, Beza, Aquinas, Bede, and St. Augustine: (2) Noah was 'a preacher of righteousness' to the people of his time, as we are expressly informed by St. Peter (2 Pet. ii. 5), in one of whose Epistles these two controverted texts are found; who, therefore, could not mean, that the preaching of the gospel to the antediluvians after they were dead was necessary in order that they might be judged as men to whom the offer of salvation had been made, for it had been made to them while they were alive in the preaching of Noah, and they had rejected it: (3) In the same connection, he speaks of them, not as being in a state of probation where the gospel could still be preached to them, but as 'kept under punishment unto the day of judgment,' precisely as he speaks of the lost angels (ii. 4-9): (4) In one of these texts it is said, that the Lord preached unto them 'by or in the Spirit,' which expression is not appropriate to His going and preaching to them in His own person, but it has the utmost fitness to express preaching by His Spirit in Noah: (5) When they hardened themselves against the preaching of Noah, God said, 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever' (Gen. vi. 3), thus declaring that the end of their probationary state was at hand. Now if these interpretations be correct, there is not a word in the whole Bible upon which these doctrines of a purgatory and a probation after death can be founded, but very much, as we have seen, which is directly opposed to them.

Why, then, we naturally ask, has this doctrine of Purgatory been so extensively and intensively believed? For we can trace it back to a very early age. In answer to this question, several things have to be taken into consideration.

1. There is the difficulty which we all feel in understanding how Christians who die in a state of imperfect sanctification can be received immediately into heaven; for mani-

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festly they are not fit for it when they leave this world. Often they die suddenly, in the midst of their worldliness, their hearts defiled with evil passions and inordinate affections. It was to solve this acknowledged difficulty that Purgatory was invented. But the true solution, I am persuaded, must be sought in St. Paul's distinction between sin in the mind, νοῦν, and sin in the members, as where he says: "If what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. . . . For I delight in the law of God after the inward man, but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin in my members. O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord [I shall be delivered]" (Rom. vii. 15–25). That which is to be particularly noted in all this is, that he identifies himself absolutely with his renewed spiritual nature, with that which is elsewhere called 'the new man,' 'the hidden man of the heart'; this is his 'I,' his true self; and he relegates his remaining corruptions to his members, his flesh, his lower nature, which is not his true self. It is of this new nature, also, the true self of the Christian, that St. John speaks in the words: "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin. . . . He cannot sin, because he is born of God" (1 John iii. 9). Now it is this lower element of our complex nature, the members, the flesh, in which our remaining corruptions inhere, which falls away from us at death, and leaves that in us which is born of God, our true self, free from its corrupting influences. This may enable us to understand how truly regenerate souls 'are at death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory.'

2. Another influence which has given great support to this doctrine of Purgatory, is the unscriptural belief that the sacraments are essential to salvation, which also is an ancient and hoary error. For thus the question arose, What is to become of believers who have been involuntarily prevented from observing the sacraments, and of unbaptized infants? This doctrine provided a solution of these difficulties. For

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all such adults would be purified by the purgatorial fires, in place of the sacraments, from original sin and all actual transgressions. But inasmuch as infants have no actual trangressions, a separate purgatory had to be provided for them. But the true solution of these difficulties is contained in the Scriptural doctrine of the sacraments, which is, that they are essential only when practicable. For God is greater than His ordinances, and His grace is not so limited that those who are involuntarily deprived of them cannot be sanctified without them.

3. Still another influence has greatly strengthened the two preceding, and confirmed this error, namely, the doctrine of priestly mediation, especially in this particular, that the priest, by prayers and masses for the dead, can mitigate and shorten their purgatorial sufferings. For hence it became customary for people to pay large sums of money to the priests for such prayers and masses in behalf of their deceased relatives and friends. This source of wealth has long been, and still continues to be, enormous to the Roman church. Of course, it could not fail to stimulate her zeal in teaching and impressing by all possible means this doctrine of Purgatory.

These are some of the influences which have caused this delusion of Satan so long and so extensively to prevail. But no words can adequately set forth the evil it has wrought. For it has reacted powerfully in support of priestly mediation between Christ and the souls of His people, and of the idolatrous sacrifice of the mass, so that a human and sinful priesthood has come to stand to the whole Romish communion in place of the one only divine Mediator, and the mass in place of His most holy sacrifice, which was offered once for all, and can never be repeated. It is by this means, more perhaps than by any other, that papal Rome holds her millions in mental and spiritual bondage, as much worse than political or social slavery as the soul is of more worth than the body. In this way, this pestilent error has become the great bulwark of all her other superstitions and corruptions. And what a horrible picture does it present of the state of the

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pious dead! What a hope to look forward to a long period after death, perhaps thousands of years, in the flames of Purgatory! With such a belief, how could we face the king of terrors, or bear to lay our loved ones in the tomb! How utterly incongruous is all this with the grace and love of Christ, 'who hath abolished death' (2 Tim. i. 10) for His believing and trusting people!

In conclusion, we may well bear in mind the doctrine of this vision, and of the whole Scripture, that our blessed Lord has provided a gracious and abundant reward for all our works that are wrought in Him, for His cause, for the upbuilding of His kingdom. Here, indeed, we have something worth striving for. Hence the urgency of His words: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mat. vi. 19–21). It is in this way that our works 'follow' us to our heavenly rest, and are had in everlasting remembrance before God. By them we transfer our estate from earth to heaven, where our citizenship is, and whither we are soon to remove. They are the best investment we can make, for the Lord is the best of paymasters: "His commandments are not grievous (1 John v. 3):

> Like as a father pitieth his children,
> So the Lord pitieth them that fear Him;
> For He knoweth our frame,
> He remembereth that we are dust (Ps. ciii. 13–14).
> I will spare them as a man spareth his own son that serveth him" (Mal. iii. 17).

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XXXV

THE HARVEST AND VINTAGE OF THE EARTH INGATHERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS TO THEIR REWARD AND OF THE WICKED TO THEIR PUNISHMENT XIV 14–20

This vision, like that of the Jubilate in Heaven (228), and others, and in accordance with the cyclical structure of the book (202), reaches over beyond the seven last plagues, which are yet to come, and represents what takes place at the close of the dispensation, namely, the final ingathering of the saved to their reward under the image of a reaping of cereals, and that of the wicked to their punishment under the image of a vintage of grapes and their being trodden in a wine-press.

14 And I saw, and, behold, a white cloud, and one sitting upon the cloud like unto a son of man, having a crown of gold upon His head, and a sharp sickle in His hand.

He who now appears as one like unto a son of man can be no other, of course, than the Lord Christ, who now comes forth to the harvest and vintage of the earth. He wears a crown of gold in allusion to the words of the Messianic Psalm:

> Thou settest a crown of fine gold upon His head. . . .
> Honor and majesty thou layest upon Him (Ps. xxi. 3–5);

to denote the purity and preciousness of His royal authority (33). He sits on a white cloud in token of the purity of His judgment, and of His victory over all His enemies (35); also in fulfilment of His own prophecy: "They shall see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke xxi. 27). And He holds a sharp sickle in His hand to denote that the reaping and vintage of the earth is about to begin.

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15 And another angel came forth out of the temple, crying with a great voice unto Him that sat upon the cloud, Send forth thy sickle and reap, for the time to reap is come, for the harvest of the earth is become dry.

This angel comes forth out of the temple, i. e. from the immediate presence of God, to signify that the message which he brings comes directly from God (95). His great voice denotes the urgency of the command which God now sends to His Son, that the earth is to be reaped without further delay, because its precious grain has become dry, and will perish if it be not garnered. The grain here, as elsewhere, is the symbol of the righteous, those who are to be saved out of the world. But what need of such a message, that 'the hour is come' for the reaping? Does the Son of God, the mediatorial ruler of the world, need information from His Father, that this time has come? He himself gives us the answer to this question: "Of that day, or of that hour, knoweth no one, not even the angels who are in heaven, not even the Son, but the Father only" (Mark xiii. 32). As man, nay, as Mediator, He knows not the time of the end. This is one of the 'times or seasons which the Father hath set within His own authority' (Acts i. 7). It is for this reason that He is here represented as receiving the necessary information, and command to begin the reaping, from His Father by this angel or messenger: in all which the wonderful precision of the symbolization of this book is again exemplified.

16 And He that sat upon the cloud cast His sickle upon the earth, and the earth was reaped.

This reaping symbolizes the ingathering from the natural life of man, represented by the earth (153), of all the spiritual life the seed of which has been sown in it by the Lord, and which has now become fully ripe. In the whole symbolical transaction there are significant allusions to the following and other passages: "Lift up your eyes and look upon the fields, that they are white already unto the harvest (John

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iv. 35). Whose fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly cleanse His threshing floor, and will gather His wheat into His garner" (Mat. iii. 12). No particulars of the glory of the saved are here given, because it has been before, and will be hereafter, described with great fulness. But the general idea of this glory is contained in the symbol; for as wheat is harvested and cleansed from chaff with the utmost care, in order to its being taken up to its highest use as human food, so the Lord's people, at their ingathering, are exalted to their highest sphere of usefulness, and utilized for the noblest ends which they are capable of serving, in which their true glorification consists.

17 And another angel came forth out of the temple which is in heaven, having himself also a sharp sickle.

The harvest is immediately followed by the vintage. The order of these two things is not always the same, since they are only different sides or aspects of one transaction, which is the final realization of divine justice. For as the former represents the ingathering of the righteous to their glory and reward, so the latter represents the assembling of the wicked to their judgment and punishment. This angel of the vintage, like the preceding, comes forth out of the heavenly temple though he brings no message, to signify that the punishment of the wicked, no less than the salvation of the righteous, comes immediately from God. He also holds in his hand a sickle, and not the common grape-knife, perhaps to denote that the same instrumentality by which the righteous are saved destroys the wicked, just as the gospel is a savor both of life and of death (2 Cor. ii. 16). It is sharp to signify that he is to make the vintage rapid and complete. But he cannot begin until another symbolical transaction, and one of great significance, has taken place, as follows.

18 And another angel came forth from the altar, he that hath authority of the fire; and he cried with a great cry unto him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Send forth thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.

This angel comes forth from the altar of incense. the fire

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of which is the symbol of the divine justice, and over this fire he has authority; which seems to identify him with the angel of a former vision, who casts this fire upon the earth (167); and by this authority he executes the justice of God upon the ungodly. Moreover, it is from this altar that the prayers of the saints go up before God, the burden of which is, that His kingdom may come, which necessarily requires that His justice shall be executed upon the incorrigibly rebellious (169). The time to answer these prayers has now come, and hence this angel comes forth from the altar of prayer, and cries, literally 'with a great clamor,' to the angel of the vintage, that he must hasten to 'gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe.' This vine of the earth is the Adam in man, the principle of his natural or earthly life, and its clusters are men in their fallen, unrenewed nature, in accordance with the imagery of the prophet:

> Their vine is the vine of Sodom,
> And of the fields of Gomorrah;
> Their grapes are grapes of gall,
> Their clusters are bitterness;
> Their wine is the poison of dragons,
> And the cruel venom of asps (Deut. xxxii. 32–33).

The ripeness of the grapes signifies that the cup of the world's iniquities is now full, and that the time has come for its judgment and punishment. This whole vision refers to the Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares: "The harvest is the end of the world, and the reapers are the angels. As, therefore, the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be in the end of the world: the Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth: then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear" (Mat. xiii. 38–43).

19 And the angel cast his sickle unto the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great wine-press of the wrath of

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God: 20 and the wine-press was trodden without the city; and there came forth blood out of the wine-press, even unto the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand six hundred furlongs.

This perhaps is the most appalling imagery of the final punishment of the ungodly that is to be found in the whole word of God. For although the Seer, being himself appalled, does not tell us here whom he saw treading this wine-press, yet elsewhere he informs us that it is He whose name is the Word of God who 'treadeth the wine-press of the wine of the anger of the wrath of God the Almighty' (Rev. xix. 15). This is plainly declared also in the Messianic prophecy to which there is here a significant allusion:

> Who is this that cometh from Edom,
> With crimsoned garments from Bosrah?
> This that is glorious in His apparel,
> Marching in the greatness of His strength?
> I that speak in righteousness,
> Mighty to save.
> Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel,
> And thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?
> I have trodden the wine-press alone.
> And of the peoples there was no man with me:
> Yea, I have trodden them in mine anger,
> And trampled them in my fury;
> And their life blood is sprinkled upon my garments,
> And I have stained my raiment:
> For the day of vengeance was in my heart,
> And the year of my redemption is come (Is. lxiii. 1–4).

All this, however, is in perfect accord with the statements that 'He will shepherd the nations with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces as a potter's vessel' (78); and that 'the ungodly shall call upon the rocks and mountains to fall on them, and hide them from the wrath of the Lamb' (149). For such is the justice of God, howsoever we would have it otherwise. Here also we see what perfect unity of doctrine runs through the whole Scripture; not only concerning the awful severity of the punishment of the wicked, but also that it is inseparably connected with the salvation of the righteous; for in this prophecy, as everywhere else, the day of the Lord's vengeance is that of His redemption. In fine, it

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is significantly added that the wine-press is trodden without the city, in which there may be some allusion to the Lord's having suffered outside of Jerusalem; but this city is doubtless the New Jerusalem, the final abode of the saved, from which all are excluded upon whom this punishment is inflicted. From the wine-press thus trodden blood flows in such depth and volume that it rises to the bridle-bits of the horses, and extends to the distance of 1,600 stadia, 200 miles; which still further emphasizes the severity of this execution of the divine justice. But I cannot give a more particular interpretation of these symbols. A great deal has been written on the subject, but nothing that gives any satisfaction. Yet here, as in so many other cases, though particulars may not be clear, the general sense, the very heart of the revelation, the impression it was intended to make, is perfectly evident (12); and whatever else it may contain may safely be left 'till the day shall declare it' (1 Cor. iii. 13).

1. It can hardly be without significance that this judgment upon the ungodly is represented as a vintage of grapes, and the grapes as trodden in a wine-press. Indeed, wherever in these visions wine is mentioned, with one sole exception, it has the worst possible meaning, as in 'the wine of the rage of her fornication' (274). May not this be a prophetic intimation of the horrible evils which are caused by the abuse of intoxicants? For according to the testimony of our criminal courts, it is the cause of at least three-fourths of all the crimes that are committed; and it produces more degradation, misery, and sorrow, and consigns to perdition more human beings, than any other of the baleful influences included in 'the world, the flesh, and the devil.'

2. The pity, grace, love of God cannot save men in their sins. We must be saved from sin, or we cannot be saved at all. This truth runs through the whole word of God, and is, indeed, self-evident when we come to think of it: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus [Saviour], for He shall save His people from their sins" (Mat. i. 21). This is the only salvation that He has to offer, or that is conceivable for sinful souls. A drunkard cannot be saved but by ceasing to be a

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drunkard, and so of all other sinners. Hence, as we are here admonished, God will have no mercy upon those who are found at last unsaved from their sins; there is no mercy which can reach their case: "For we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against them that do such things. And thinkest thou this, O man, who judgest them that do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God? Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his works" (Rom. ii. 2–6). It is an utter perversion of the whole revelation which God has given of Himself to gather from it that He is too merciful to punish incorrigible sinners as they deserve: and this miserable delusion, which is now so prevalent, is no less in the face of His providence in the judgments and sufferings of our sinful race in this life.

3. Here also we are instructed that there is a time when the grapes are not yet ripe for the vintage, when judgment is delayed; and some of the reasons for this delay we can understand. In fact, they were not wholly unknown to the heathen, for one of them, the amiable and accomplished Plutarch, has left us a treatise on *the Delay of the Divine Justice*, which is one of the most precious remains of heathen antiquity. One such reason, and probably the most important of all, is, that God may bring to bear upon us all the power of His longsuffering mercy to lead us to repentance; for 'He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (2 Pet. iii. 9). Yet this delay has its necessary limits; the clusters of the vine become ripe, when they must be gathered and cast into the wine-press; for where mercy fails, justice must be executed. How precious, then, must be the time of this delay! What unspeakable folly to let it pass unimproved! What intolerable self-proach, remorse, must the lost one suffer for this folly!

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With what heart-piercing anguish must he say to himself: I might have been saved; the sacrifice of Christ was offered for me, and I might have accepted it. Through many long years God exercised upon me His longsuffering compassion. I was often admonished and entreated to flee from the wrath to come. I knew that I ought to repent and accept the offered salvation. But I abused the mercy that would have saved me, and put off, day after day, month after month, year after year, my return to God. I resisted and grieved His Holy Spirit, that never ceased to strive with me to draw me away from self-destruction. I trampled upon the blood of my Saviour which was shed for me. I hardened myself in impenitence until it was too late; until the cup of my iniquity was filled up, and the patience of God was exhausted. I was a tree planted in a very fruitful soil, watered with the dew and the rain from heaven, and the quickening sunbeams were not withheld; but I bore no fruit unto God; my boughs were loaded with the apples of Sodom. I was a vine set in a vineyard, under the choicest heavenly influences, pruned and tended with all the vinedresser's care; but my clusters were the grapes of Gomorrah. O my lost soul, thou hast destroyed thyself.

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XXXVI

THE ANGELS OF THE LAST PLAGUES THE GLASSY SEA THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB THE GREAT GLORY OF GOD XV 1–8

This is the last vision of the seven trumpets, and the first of the seven last plagues: for as, in the rhythmical structure of the book, the seventh seal opens into the seven trumpets, so the seventh trumpet opens into the seven last plagues (163). The vision contains a number of particulars in preparation for the full disclosure of these plagues, i. e. the seven angels who minister in them; the glassy sea mingled with fire; the saved with the harps of God in their hands, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb; the glory and power of God in the heavenly temple. The whole is a heaven-scene, and all these particulars have their centre and unity in the idea of preparation for the tremendous judgments of the seven last plagues.

1 And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous: seven angels having seven plagues, the last, for in them is the wrath of God accomplished.

This is 'another' sign with reference to the two which he has seen before, namely, those of the travailing woman and the great red dragon. It is seen 'in heaven,' i. e. in the sky, and includes all the phenomena of the vision, for these angels do not appear until near its close. It is 'great and marvellous,' both with respect to its size as represented in the sky, and to the glory of these angels, the mysterious and fearful judgments in which they minister, the glassy sea, the joy and song of the saved, and all the other particulars of the vision. The number 'seven' of the angels and of their plagues is significant of the fulness and perfection of this

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accomplishment of the wrath of God, and of its efficacy in subduing the rebellion of the world (14).

2 And I saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire, and them that had come off victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing on the glassy sea, having the harps of God.

As the worshippers of the beast include the whole ungodly world, with special reference to those in the church who have been fatally corrupted by it (285), so they who have come off victorious from the conflict with him must include all the saved, yet with a like special reference to those in the church who have been sorely tempted by worldly influences, but have obtained the victory over them. It is the people of God, then, in their totality, who are here seen as having overcome all antichristian powers and influences, especially the corrupting influences of the world in the church, and as standing 'on,' i. e. on the shore of this glassy sea; which, as we have seen, is the symbol of human life, with reference to the providence of God in dealing with its stormy perturbations (112); under which, whereas it was formerly opaque and inscrutable, it has now become smooth as glass and transparent as crystal. Here it is mingled with fire, the constant symbol of divine justice, to denote that life is permeated with this justice for the chastisement and purification of God's people, and for the punishment of His incorrigible enemies. The saved are now seen as having passed through it, and as standing on its farther shore, with the harps of God in their hands, to signify that they have been purified by the fire with which it is mingled, and that they are no longer subject to its fiery trials; for all which they now praise God with their harps and voices. The whole representation is to be interpreted by the allusion which runs through it to the passage of the children of Israel through the Red Sea, in which the pursuing host of their enemies were drowned; after which they found themselves in safety on the farther shore, and celebrated their deliverance with festive joy, timbrels, and dancing. This allusion will be more fully developed in what immediately follows.

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3 And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and wonderful are thy works, O Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, O thou King of the nations. 4 Who, O Lord, shall not fear and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy: for all the nations shall come and worship before thee, because thy righteousnesses have been made manifest.

The allusion here is to that song of Moses wherewith he and his people celebrated their deliverance from the Egyptians by the overthrow of Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. Its character may be seen in the following quotations:

I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath He cast into the sea . . .
Thy right hand, O Lord, is glorious in power;
Thy right hand, O Lord, dasheth in pieces the enemy . . .
Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like unto thee, glorious in holiness,
Fearful in praises, doing wonders? . . .
Thou in thy mercy hast led the people whom thou hast redeemed;
Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.
The peoples have heard; they tremble;
Fear hath taken hold upon the inhabitants of Philistia . . .
Terror and dread falleth upon them;
By the greatness of thine arm they are as still as a stone,
Till thy people pass over, O Lord;
Till the people pass over whom thou hast redeemed.
Thou wilt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of thine inheritance;
The place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thee to dwell in;
The sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.

And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and dances; and Miriam answered them:

Sing ye unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath He cast into the sea (Ex. xv. 1–21).

Now this deliverance of the Old Testament church from her bondage in Egypt, that she might devote herself wholly to the service of God, is, as we have seen, one of the grand historic types of the deliverance of the latter-day church from subjection to the great antichristian world-power (282). This power has now been overthrown and destroyed in this sea that is 'mingled with fire,' as the Egyptians were in the Red

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Sea; and the people of God are now set free to devote themselves wholly to the service and praise of their great Deliverer. Hence the song which they now sing on the farther shore of this sea, after they have come off victorious from their conflicts with the beast and his image, and have come safely through all their earthly temptations and trials, is called 'the song of Moses.' It is also 'the song of the Lamb,' because their deliverance has been wrought out through His sacrifice and all-conquering power, and is the fulfilment or realization of its typical foreshadowing in the deliverance of Israel. In almost every word of it there is some allusion to corresponding expressions in the song of Moses. For it celebrates the works of God, the Almighty, or All-Ruler (23), as great and wonderful, because nothing short of His almighty power could have accomplished this great deliverance; also, His truth, holiness, and covenant faithfulness, to which last idea the peculiar word ὅσιος, here rendered 'holy,' has a special reference; and His 'righteousnesses,' or righteous judgments, as now made manifest; in consequence of which all the nations of the earth shall come and worship before Him, and glorify His name: in all which we have a grand prophecy of the glory and joy of the saved, and subordinately, as it would seem, of the Lord's millennial reign, which will follow the overthrow of the world-power.

5 And after these things I saw, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened; 6 and there came forth out of the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, arrayed in pure bright linen, and girt about the breasts with golden girdles.

Having represented the deliverance and festive rejoicing of the saved, the vision now proceeds with a more particular description of the angelic ministers in these last judgments. They come forth out of 'the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven'—cumulative expressions intended to designate emphatically the inmost shrine of the Holy of Holies, where was the ark of the testimony, now made visible by the opening of the temple (231)—to signify that the judgments which they are to inflict proceed from God, who

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'dwells between the cherubim' (Ps. lxxx. 1), and especially from His holiness, truth, and covenant faithfulness to His promises, in which He has given the kingdoms of the world unto His Son, in order to the fulfilment of which these judgments are now to be executed. The appearance of these angels is very glorious. They are arrayed in pure, bright linen (85), to denote that they are holy beings, and that the wrath of God of which they are the ministers is no impure, personal, or selfish passion, but His holiness and justice in the government of His moral creatures: and they are girt about the breasts with golden girdles, like the Lord Himself (34), as being endued with His royal authority to execute His pure and precious justice upon the rebellious world.

7 And one of the four living creatures gave unto the seven angels seven golden chalices full of the wrath of God, who liveth forever and ever.

These creatures are, as we have seen, the symbols of the wisdom and power of God in nature, and hence of nature itself in its totality (113). In the vision of the first four seals they call forth God's four sore judgments, war, pestilence, famine, and beasts of prey, because it is within the realm and by the destructive forces of nature, including man, that those judgments are executed (128). Here one of them reappears and gives to these seven angels seven chalices or bowls ('vials,' in the English Bible, does not give the meaning of the Greek word) full of the wrath of God, to denote that these plagues will take effect, in great part at least, within the same realm and by the same forces, i. e. as we shall see, in the sun, air, earth, rivers, and fountains. The chalices are of gold, to signify that nothing is more pure or precious than the divine justice and judgments (33); and they are full of the wrath of God, 'who liveth forever and ever,' to denote that His justice, being one of His essential attributes, can never cease to be exercised.

8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter into the temple, until the seven plagues of the seven angels should be accomplished.

These particulars of the vision refer to such parallel pas-

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sages as the following: "The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle: and Moses was not able to enter into the tent of meeting, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle (Ex. xl. 34–35). And the Lord said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the Lord to gaze, and many of them perish (xix. 21). The cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord (1 Ki. viii. 10–11). And one [of the seraphim] cried unto another, and said:

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory.
And the foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried;
And the house was filled with smoke (Is. vi. 3–4).
Clouds and darkness are round about Him;
Justice and judgment are the foundation of His throne (Ps. xcvii. 2).
There went up smoke in His wrath,
And fire out of His mouth devoured (xviii. 8).

The meaning is, that God, especially in the exercise of His justice, is veiled from the scrutiny of finite minds; for we are not able to see the necessity for its awful severity. We cannot estimate the enormity of the evil of sin, nor bear the effulgence of the divine glory in its punishment. Hence it is that when God sends forth these ministers of His wrath, the temple of His immediate presence is filled with smoke, and no one is able to enter in to gaze upon Him, until His judgments are accomplished. But when that shall have taken place, and we shall have come to stand in the light of His immediate presence, then all the mysteries of His justice and judgment will be cleared up, and 'we shall see Him as He is' (1 John iii. 2).

There is no doubt but that these last plagues are yet to come upon the world; and in order that we should pass through them unscathed, we must learn to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, which is that of our deliverance from bondage to the earthly and worldly life; we must have in full exercise that faith which is the very substance of our

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hoped-for deliverance when the great antichristian world-power shall be destroyed (Heb. xi. 1), and by which only can we conform our lives to the admonition of the holy apostle: "If, then, ye have been raised together with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God: set your affection on the things which are above, and not on the things which are on the earth: for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God: when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory" (Col. iii. 1–4).

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XXXVII

THE SEVEN LAST PLAGUES THE JUDGMENTS OF THE LAST TIMES XVI 1–21

These last judgments are called plagues in general, and often in special reference to the plagues of Egypt, by which the Old Testament church was delivered from that world-power. The primary meaning of the word is a blow or stroke including the idea of punishment. For the most part, no doubt, these plagues are yet to come upon the world, and some of them may be in the far distant future, so that a perfectly lucid explanation is hardly to be expected (11). In fact, we shall find here much of that obscurity we have had to deal with in the more summary disclosures of the sixth seal, of which this fifth series of the revelations is a more ample development (146). It seems plain, however, from both these visions, as well as from other Scriptural references to this 'day of the Lord' (148), that it will be attended with great cosmical disturbances and convulsions in the physical world (149); all which, however, are to be taken as symbolical of moral and spiritual punitory inflictions; and these are not successive in time, but cumulative in their effects (228).

1 And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying unto the seven angels, Go, and pour out the seven chalices of the wrath of God upon the earth.

This great voice is to be understood as that of God, from whose immediate presence in His heavenly temple it is heard, from which also the angels to whom it speaks have just come. The earth here, upon which all the chalices are to be poured out, includes both sea and land, with fountains

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and rivers, even the sun and air, and represents the whole natural life of man in its utter alienation from God (241).

2 And the first went, and poured out his chalice upon the earth: and there came a noisome and grievous sore upon the people that had the mark of the beast and that worshipped his image.

Here the earth is evidently to be taken in distinction from the sea, upon which the second angel will pour out his chalice. As thus limited, it represents the natural life of man in a limited sense, as distinguished from that which manifests itself in his political organizations (245). Those who have the mark of the beast and who worship his image are primarily the members of the church who have been fatally corrupted by the world, and secondarily the ungodly world at large (285). In this judgment there is an evident reference to the sixth Egyptian plague, which was 'a boil breaking forth with blains upon man and upon beast throughout all the land of Egypt' (Ex. ix. 9); also to Moses' prophecy concerning Israel, if they should rebel against God: "The Lord will smite thee with the boil of Egypt, and with tumours, and with the scurvy, and with the itch, whereof thou canst not be healed . . . from the sole of thy foot unto the crown of thy head" (Deut. xxviii. 28–35): in which allusions both to the Israelites and to the Egyptians we have further evidence that this infliction includes those who are in the church and out of it. As to its significance, it may include physical maladies, but symbolically it represents judicial visitations of a moral and spiritual nature, as in the words of the prophet: "Why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more. The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and festering sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with oil" (Is. i. 5–6). Such is this first of the seven last plagues.

3 And the second poured out his chalice upon the sea, and it became as the blood of a dead man, and every living creature, the things in the sea, died.

This judgment contains an equally significant allusion to

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the first of the Egyptian plagues, by which the waters of the river, as also of the streams and reservoirs, were turned into blood, and the fish died, and the river stank, and the people could not drink of it (Ex. vii. 19–21). In like manner, at the sound of the second trumpet in these visions, a third part of the sea became blood, and a third part of the creatures in it died (173). The sea is the constant symbol of national life; and here it becomes as the blood of a dead man (which is deprived of life, its organization being dissolved), and all the living creatures in it perish: whereby it is signified that under this judgment national life becomes extinct, and all national and municipal organizations are dissolved (174), having proved themselves incompetent by their utter worldliness to save society from all-dissolving corruption. Thus the way is prepared for the kingdoms of this world to become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ (228), when there will be no more sea (Rev. xxi. 1).

4 And the third poured out his chalice upon the rivers and fountains of waters, and they became blood.

Here the allusion to the Egyptian plague of blood is continued, with a parallelism between this judgment and that of the third trumpet (174), under which the rivers and fountains are made bitter. These have the same symbolical significance in both cases, namely, that of the sources and streams of spiritual life, with special reference to the truth of God, wherein this life originates, and whereby it is nourished (175). They are turned into blood, to denote that revealed truth becomes so corrupted with pestilent heresies that it is no longer the nourishment of spiritual life, but rather a poison causing spiritual death. This judicial infliction probably commences with the death of the two witnesses (220); and its fearful severity gives occasion to an interruption in the orderly progress of the vision for the vindication of the divine justice, as follows:

5 And I heard the angel of the waters saying, Thou art just, who art, and who wast, [yea] holy, because thou hast judged these things; 6 for they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and blood hast

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thou given them to drink: they are worthy. 7 And I heard the altar saying, Even so, O Lord God Almighty, true and just are thy judgments.

This angel of the waters may be compared with the angels of the winds in a former vision (152). But the deeper meaning of the symbol must be elicited by reference to those instances of the ministry of angels in communicating to man messages of truth from God which abound in these visions, and in all the Scriptures; for I think we must regard this angel as a symbolical representation and personification of this ministry. The waters of the rivers and fountains here, as elsewhere (316), represent the sources and streams of spiritual life as originating in, and nourished by, the truths of the word; hence it is natural for the angel who presides over them to be deeply interested in keeping them pure; and when he beholds them corrupted by being turned into blood, that he should feel the most poignant grief. But even he, instead of murmuring or complaining, adores the justice and holiness of God in this judicial infliction, for they who suffer it are worthy to be thus judged: because they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, it is most just and holy in God that He should give them blood to drink, that their crimes should be thus retaliated. The formula, 'who art, and who wast' here, as in a former case, is without the addition, 'and who art to come' (229), apparently because the Lord is regarded as having come in these last judgments. Here also, as in the song of the saved on the shore of the crystal sea, the word ὅσιος 'holy' is peculiar (310), having pointed reference to the covenant faithfulness of God in behalf of the martyred saints and prophets, whose blood is now so amply avenged. But what is most striking and significant is this bold personification of the altar of incense, from which the prayers of all the saints, with the merits and intercessions of Christ, go up before God (166), and which is now heard saying in articulate words, 'Even so, O Lord God Almighty, true and just are thy judgments.' For thus the truthfulness of God in fulfilling both His promises and His threatenings, and His judgments as most just, as

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equitably corresponding to the crimes of those who are judged, are vindicated and proclaimed both in the prayers of the saints and in the mediation of Christ. And how solemn, how wonderful it all is! What a stroke of genius it would be, if it were found in a tragedy of Æschylus or Sophocles!

8 And the fourth poured out his chalice upon the sun: and it was given unto it to scorch the people with fire; 9 and the people were scorched with a great heat; and they blasphemed the name of God, [as] having authority over these plagues, and they repented not to give Him glory.

In the vision of the fourth trumpet the sun, being darkened, is regarded as the source of light (176), but here as the source of heat, with a different symbolical meaning. For its heat quickens and develops organic life, and hence it naturally becomes the symbol of the quickening and developing influence in spiritual life. But when it is received under unfavorable conditions, it becomes destructive, as in our Lord's parable. "When the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away" (Mat. xiii. 6). Here this destructive heat scorches the people; which signifies that, as in the preceding plague the streams of revealed truth became corrupt, nauseous, and pernicious, so in this one the influence which quickens the good seed in the good ground, scorches and withers that which has fallen upon a rock. For both these benign influences, the word and that which quickens it, where they are not 'a savor of life unto life,' do necessarily become 'a savor of death unto death' (2 Cor. ii. 15). Hence they upon whom this scorching judgment falls do not repent, nor give glory to God, but blaspheme His name, charging Him with injustice and cruelty, 'as having authority over these plagues': an awful picture of judicial impenitence!

10 And the fifth poured out his chalice upon the throne of the beast: and his kingdom was darkened; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, 11 and blasphemed the God of heaven, because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their works.

In this judgment there is an allusion to the ninth Egyp-

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tian plague, that of darkness over the whole land (Ex. x. 21–23); and it is to be compared with that of the fourth trumpet (176), also with the fifth, which represents the torments of human life as the judgments of God (183). This beast, from the mention of 'his throne and kingdom,' which he receives from the dragon (245), appears to be the one that rises out of the sea, representing antichristian secular power; yet those upon whom this judgment falls are identified by their sores with the subjects of the second beast, as in the first plague (315); which is to be explained by the synthesis established between these two forms of antichristianity (285). Under this judicial infliction 'the kingdom of the beast is darkened'; which denotes that his subjects, both in and out of the church, suffer a terrible obscuration of their intellectual and moral faculties, great confusion and distraction of mind, as in the following: "The Lord will smite thee with madness and with blindness and with astonishment of heart (Deut. xxviiii. 28). He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth" (John xii. 35). For in this judicial blindness men are deprived of all right knowledge of God and divine things; they lose all consciousness of their sins as the true cause of their miseries and torments; and these they ascribe to God, regarding Him as a malignant and cruel being. Hence it is added that they repent not of their works, but blaspheme the God of heaven, and gnaw their tongues; which last is an expression of raging passion, as well as of intolerable torment: another awful image of judicial impenitence!

12 And the sixth poured out his chalice upon the great river Euphrates: and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.

This in some respects is one of the most difficult symbols in the book, yet we are not left without some glimpses of its meaning. For the city of Babylon drew her support and nourishment mainly from the Euphrates, from which that whole region was irrigated and made fertile by a vast system of canals and artificial water-courses: also, it was by an

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assault from the river, the water of which had been previously drawn off into reservoirs, that the city was taken, and the empire subverted, by Cyrus the Persian, whose kingdom lay to the east of Babylonia. Hence we may understand that this drying up of the Euphrates represents the withdrawal of all the sources of support, wealth, and life from the great antichristian world-power, of which Babylon is the constant symbol; also the laying bare of this power to overthrow and destruction (278), as the water of the river was drawn off by Cyrus to prepare his way for a successful assault upon the city. For we shall see hereafter that this great world-power becomes divided (Rev. xvi. 19), and certain kings, or political powers, take part in its overthrow (xvii. 12–18); and these, it seems, are here called 'the kings from the east,' in allusion to the capture of Babylon by an eastern king, and perhaps to signify that the destruction of this power will come from the primary source of light and life, as we have seen that the great angel who seals the servants of God comes up from the east (153).

13 And I saw, out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet, 14 three unclean spirits, as it were frogs; for they are the spirits of devils, working signs, which go forth upon the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the battle of the great day of God Almighty.

We have here again the synthesis of these three forms of antichristianity; for this beast is still the one that rises out of the sea, and receives his kingdom and throne from the dragon (245); whilst the second beast is here designated by 'the false prophet,' as is evident from the fact, that the same signs and works are attributed to both. For of this latter beast it has been said that 'he doeth great signs . . . and he deceiveth them that dwell upon the earth by the signs which were given unto him to do' (254); and of the false prophet it will be said hereafter that 'he wrought the signs . . . wherewith he deceived them that had the mark of the beast' (Rev. xix. 20). This equivalent characterization and other correspondences leave no doubt as to their identity, and

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accordingly it has been recognized by all the commentators. But why this new name of 'false prophet'? Evidently it is introduced here and continued in the succeeding visions for the purpose of giving a more ample development to the idea of antichristianity in the church as a worker of pretended miracles to deceive mankind (254), in fulfilment of the Lord's prophecy: "There will arise false Christs and false prophets, and they will give signs and wonders unto the deceiving, if possible, even the elect" (Mat. xxiv. 24). And now there are seen to come forth out of the mouths of the dragon, the beast out of the sea, and the beast out of the earth, or false prophet, 'three unclean spirits,' 'spirits of devils,' or demons, like frogs for their filthiness and obscenity; which, since no distinction is made between them in their operations, and in accordance with the established synthesis of these three antichristian powers, must be understood to represent the inmost essence and most deadly virus of antichristianity, especially in the form of false teachings, 'doctrines of devils' (1 Tim. iv. 1), confirmed by these pretended miracles. This baleful influence takes effect upon the kings, or secular powers of the whole world, including their subjects, to gather them together unto the battle of the great day of God Almighty; in which He will show Himself to be the omnipotent All-Ruler by their overthrow and utter destruction. The particulars of this final conflict will be given in a subsequent vision.

15 Behold, I come as a thief: blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.

The signal character of the preceding disclosure gives occasion to this interjected admonition from the Lord to His people, that they must be ever on the watch for His coming, which is always as a thief in the night (84), and that they keep themselves in purity, lest they should be deceived by the falsities and involved in the impurities of these spirits of devils (85).

16 And they gathered them together unto a place that is called in Hebrew Harmagedon.

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The most probable interpretation of this Hebrew name is, either 'the place of a multitudinous rabble,' or 'the place of the overthrow of their host,' and it may contain allusions to both of these ideas. For etymologically it signifies Mount-Magedon, or Megiddo, which was the scene of the overthrow of the tumultuous host of the Canaanites under Sisera by Deborah and Barak, as celebrated in the triumphant song of the prophetess:

> The kings came and fought:
> Then fought the kings of Canaan,
> In Tánach by the waters of Megiddo.
> They took no gain of money [booty].
> They fought from heaven [against them];
> The stars in their courses fought against Sisera.
> The river Kishon swept them away,
> That ancient river, the river Kishon (Judges v. 19-20).

It was by this river also that Elijah slew Jezebel's false prophets, and purified Israel from the idolatry of Baal (1 Ki. xviii. 40). From these and other indications we may gather that this name symbolizes the overthrow and destruction of the tumultuous hosts of 'the kings' who have been deceived by the teachings and signs of the false prophet.

17 And the seventh poured out his chalice upon the air: and there came a great voice out of the temple from the throne, saying, It is done. 18 And there were lightnings and voices and thunders; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since there was a man upon the earth, such an earthquake, so great. 19 And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell: and Babylon the Great was remembered before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the anger of His wrath. 20 And every island fled, and mountains were not found: 21 and great hail, as of the weight of a talent, came down from heaven upon the people, and the people blasphemed God, because of the plague of the hail, for great was the plague thereof exceedingly.

The air, being the breath of life and everywhere diffused, may be understood as the universal life-sphere of mankind. It is represented as empoisoned by this chalice of wrath, to denote that the old Adamic life now comes to an end in preparation for the incoming of the new heaven and the new earth. Hence a great voice is now heard coming out of the

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temple from the throne of God, saying, 'It is done'; which recalls the last words of the Lord upon the cross, 'It is finished' (John xix. 30), for in both cases is the wrath of God accomplished. This final execution of the divine justice is accompanied with 'lightnings and voices and thunders' (111), and with an unparalleled earthquake, or trembling of the physical universe, the same with that of the sixth seal (146); the elements and forces of nature are thrown into preternatural commotion and convulsions, thus symbolizing the mental agitation and confusion, and the subversion to their foundations of all human institutions and relations, which this judgment produces. Moreover, the great city of this world, the great antichristian world-power (222), is divided into three parts, apparently with reference to its dissolution hereafter to be described, when God will put it into the hearts of certain kings who are a part of it to turn against and overthrow it (Rev. xvii. 16). The fall of the cities of the nations, also its elements and branches, completes this general outline of its utter destruction, the particulars of which will be given hereafter. Thus Babylon the Great is remembered before God, and all her abominations of idolatry, lust, and cruelty in shedding the blood of saints and prophets, are judged and punished. God now gives her to drink of 'the cup of the wine of the anger of His wrath': these cumulative repetitions expressing with the utmost energy the rigor of her punishment, and the world-comprehensiveness of her overthrow. And this idea is still further developed by the islands fleeing away, and the mountains not being found, to signify that all things most stable and immovable in man's earthly life are subverted (147); and by the great hail that falls from heaven, in allusion to the Egyptian plague of hail (Ex. ix. 23–26), and to the following: "The Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them . . . and they died: they were more who died with the hailstones than they whom the sons of Israel slew with the sword" (Joshua x. 11). Here the hailstones are 'of the weight of a talent,' about 50 lbs., 60 times that of a mina, which last is mentioned by a Greek author as enormous for

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the weight of hail. Yet the people upon whom this infliction falls do not repent, but blaspheme God, as the unjust and merciless author of their sufferings: from all which it is plain that this seventh and last plague, whatever further symbolical meaning may be gathered from it, represents the destruction from the earth of the incorrigibly rebellious, as a necessary means to the unveiling and realization of the glories of the New Jerusalem.

Here this fifth series of the revelations of the book comes to an end; and, like those which precede, it runs on to the close of the dispensation in great and awful judgments (202). In such wise is 'the mystery of God,' in dealing with the evil that is in the world, accomplished. And it is for us, however we may weep over the necessity of these judgments, to rejoice and give thanks that this evil shall cease at last, and the Lord will reign in grace and love and glory over all the redeemed, i. e. in all human souls that shall overcome in their conflicts with it, and shall come safely through 'the great tribulation' (160).

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XXXVIII

BABYLON AS A HARLOT SPIRITUAL ADULTERY XVII 1–18

This vision commences the sixth series of these revelations, which, like the preceding, may be regarded as sevenfold, although this is by no means so distinctly marked as in the former. The following, however, are the most salient ideas: (1) The harlotry and destruction of Babylon; (2) the deliverance of the true church from her power; (3) the rejoicing in heaven over this deliverance; (4) the Lord as conquering King; (5) the binding of Satan and the Lord's millennial reign; (6) the loosing of Satan and the final conflict; (7) the resurrection and judgment of the dead. We shall meet here with some of our greatest difficulties from the fact, that what is symbolized is mostly in the dim future, and the symbols are deeply involved with preceding ones and with each other: difficulties which might be insurmountable, if the Apocalyptist had not been so careful to put into our hands certain guiding clews to enable us to thread the dark labyrinths of his visions.

1 And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven chalices, and spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the judgment of the great harlot that sitteth upon many waters; 2 with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication.

As the seals open into the trumpets, and the trumpets into the plagues, so this series of visions is connected with the preceding by the ministry of one of these angels (307); another reason for which is, that it contains a full development of what has just been given in a brief summary (323). The

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angel speaks of 'the harlot' and of 'many waters,' in some good manuscripts, 'the many waters,' as if these were familiar images, for which there are two reasons: (1) This harlot woman, who now appears for the first time, is another symbol of the same antichristian world-power that has been hitherto represented by the harlot city Babylon, whose name she bears on her forehead, and who is addressed by one of the prophets in the words, 'O thou that dwellest upon many waters' (Jer. li. 13), in allusion to the Euphrates upon which the city was built, and to the vast system of artificial watercourses by which the surrounding country was irrigated (320). The symbolical meaning of these waters will be explained by the angel at the close of this vision. (2) Another reason why 'the harlot' is here introduced as a familiar image is, that Babylon, with which she is identified, has been characterized as having 'made all the nations to drink of the wine of the rage of her fornication' (274). Moreover, the significant fact, that the city now disappears for a time, and in its place we have a woman bearing the same name, makes it evident that the antichristian world-power has undergone a change, and reappears under modified conditions: and the whole symbolization, both here and elsewhere, requires us to understand that what is now to be represented is the world in the church, or the church in adulterous union with the world; for this is the plain meaning of the image of harlotry in 18 out of the 21 places in Scripture where it occurs, in some of which it is developed at great length and with almost unrivalled force of expression (Ez. xvi.).

3 And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet beast full of the names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.

In a state of spiritual ecstasy produced by the influence of the Holy Spirit (26) he is transported into this wilderness, which is evidently different from that one into which we have seen the martyr church borne on the wings of the great eagle (240); for it seems to be an image of the desolation

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wrought upon earth by the malign influence of the harlot and of the beast on which she rides. Moreover, this beast is clearly identified with the one that rises out of the sea (244), representing antichristian political power, by his seven heads and ten horns and by his names of blasphemy. But he too has undergone significant modifications; for he has become of a scarlet or blood color, and thus more closely assimilated to the great red dragon from whom his power is derived; his names of blasphemy have spread from his heads over his whole body (244); and he has lost his diadems through subjection to the woman who rides upon him. Thus we have pictorially and prophetically represented the subjection of the temporal powers to the corrupt spiritual power of the church, the great increase of cruelty and bloody persecution which resulted from it (248), and of blasphemy against the Lord Christ by the perpetration of these crimes in His name (254): all which was abundantly realized during the middle ages in the relations that subsisted between the church of Rome and the secular powers of Europe. Thus also a striking contrast is implied between the true church and this harlot corruption of it; for the former is always represented as oppressed and persecuted by the worldly powers, whilst here the latter, by her adulterous union with them, obtains control over them, and renders them subservient to her luxury and persecuting spirit, as the harlot becomes the 'mistress' of her lovers. With what wonderful precision are all these ideas and historical facts here symbolized!

4 And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and was decked with gold and precious stones and pearls; having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations and the uncleannesses of her fornication; 5 and upon her forehead a name written, a mystery: BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

The harlot church is arrayed in purple to denote the royal temporal authority which she has acquired by her adulterous union with the secular powers, as exemplified in the papacy; also in scarlet, or blood color, like the beast on which she rides, to express her persecuting spirit and char-

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acter. The ornaments wherewith she is decked are the precious things with which she was formerly enriched and beautified by her celestial Spouse, when she was His pure and honored wife, but which she has now perverted and profaned to the uses of her meretricious solicitations, as in the prophet:

> I decked thee also with ornaments,
> And I put bracelets upon thy hands,
> And a chain upon thy neck . . .
> And a beautiful crown upon thy head.
> Thou wast decked with gold and silver,
> And thy raiment was of fine linen
> And silk and broidered work. . . .
> And thou wast exceeding beautiful. . . .
> And thy renown went forth among the nations for thy beauty;
> For it was perfect through my majesty which I had put upon thee . . .
> But thou didst trust in thy beauty,
> And playedst the harlot because of thy renown,
> And pouredst forth thy harlotries on every one that passed by. . . .
> Thou didst also take thy fair jewels of my gold
> And silver, which I had given thee,
> And madest for thee images of men,
> And didst play the harlot with them (Ez. xvi. 10–18).

In like manner, the 'golden cup,' which, in the hand of the true church, and filled with sacramental wine, is the symbol of the holiest consecration and fellowship, is here, in the hand of the harlot, filled with abominations and the filthinesses of her fornication, to signify that the apostate church profanes all her holiest things by her sacrilegious fellowship with, and conformity unto, the world. In fine, the name Babylon upon her forehead is 'a mystery,' i. e. a name of mystical or symbolical import, to denote that she is only another form or manifestation of the same antichristian world-power hitherto represented by the harlot city: and she is the mother of harlots and abominations, to denote that the spiritual harlotry of the church corrupted by the world is of the grossest character, and the source of the most abominable sexual impurities, as exemplified in the Protestant church by the frequency of divorces, and in the Roman by the licentiousness arising from the enforced celibacy of the clergy, especially when they were formally allowed to keep their

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mistresses by paying the regulation tax on the connection to their prince-bishops.

6 And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus; and seeing her I wondered with a great wonder.

The world-power in the church has lost nothing of its enmity and persecuting spirit; on the contrary, this is aggravated and intensified, so that the harlot church makes herself drunken with the blood of the saints and martyrs; which also has been abundantly exemplified in persecutions by the papacy (254). The whole symbol excites the wonder of the Seer, which, as expressed in his face, brings to his aid the angel of the vision, who interprets it for him, though still in highly symbolical language.

7 And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou wonder? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that bears her, which hath the seven heads and the ten horns.

The woman and the beast constitute one mystery, or symbolical representation, as representing the church and the world in union.

8 The beast which thou sawest was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss, and he goeth into perdition: and they who dwell upon the earth shall wonder, whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, seeing the beast that he was, and is not, and is yet to come.

This obscure symbolization finds its solution in the conception of the beast as representing antichristian secular power; for the expression 'was, and is not,' has reference to this power as formerly existing in Egypt, Babylon, and other pagan world empires, but which no longer existed; and this reference will become still further evident in the sequel. But he 'is about to come' again, and that under a truly diabolical form, as 'out of the abyss'; which took place when the secular powers, having ceased from persecution under Constantine and his immediate successors, became the ser-

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vile instruments of the harlot church unto renewed persecutions. The meaning is the same as that of the healing of the beast's deadly wound (246). His 'going into perdition' evidently refers to the issue of the great conflict previous to the millennium, when, as we shall see, 'the beast is taken . . . and cast into the lake of fire' (Rev. xix. 20), denoting the utter destruction of all antichristian secular power (323). The wonder of the earth-dwellers, 'whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world' (249), doubtless partakes of the nature of idolatrous worship (247); but here it seems to have for its special object this marvellous persistence of life in the beast under such diverse conditions and adverse circumstances.

9 Here is the mind that hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, upon which the woman sitteth, 10 and are seven kings: five are fallen, one is, the other is not yet come; and when he cometh he must continue a little while: 11 and the beast that was, and is not, he also is the eighth, and is of the seven, and he goeth into perdition.

Here is the [place for the] mind that hath wisdom, i. e. to understand this very involved symbol (256). For the woman whom we have just seen riding upon the beast is now represented as sitting upon seven mountains, in evident allusion to those upon which the city of Rome was built, which was celebrated by the poets and historians as 'the seven-hilled city,' and was at that time the seat of the great antichristian world-power. The seven heads of the beast, which primarily symbolized the fulness of his wisdom as the subtlety of the serpent (235), are here taken more concretely to represent the site of the existing world-empire, and hence of that empire itself, which, of course, was wholly governed and administered by worldly wisdom. Moreover, the interpreting angel sees in these seven heads even a larger significance, that of 'seven kings,' or world-empires, five of which have ceased to exist, one is, and one is yet to come, which may be enumerated as follows: (1) The Egyptian, (2) the old Assyrian, of which Nineveh was the capital, (3) the later Assyrian or Babylonian, (4) the Medo-Persian, (5) the Macedonian or Grecian, (6) that

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of pagan Rome, (7) that of papal Rome, regarded as a temporal or secular power. At the time of these visions the first five of these had fallen or ceased to exist, that of pagan Rome was in its power and glory, and that of papal Rome was yet to come; when it should 'continue a little while,' as the temporal power of the papacy has come to an end in our time. In fine, the words, 'the beast that was, and is not, he also is the eighth, and he goeth into perdition,' we may understand in the sense, that the beast represents the substance and spirit of the seven, and that he contains in himself what is destined to develop into an eighth form of antichristian secular power, perhaps an all-comprehending godless democracy, in which political antichristianity may hereafter be summed up and concentrated, before it shall go into everlasting perdition.

12 And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings who have not yet received kingdoms; but they receive authority as kings one hour with the beast. 13 These have one mind, and they give their power and authority unto the beast. 14 These will war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them; for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and they that are with Him are called and chosen and faithful.

These ten horns of the beast, which primarily symbolized antichristian political power as definitely limited (235), are also taken here more concretely, to represent 'ten kings,' i. e. not world-empires, as in the case of the seven heads, but minor political organizations, which had not then come into existence, and which must be understood as those that arose on the ruins of the Roman empire, and probably others yet to come. For it would seem that this number 'ten' is not to be taken strictly here, but rather in the symbolical sense of limitation (59). These kings receive authority with the beast, and are all of one mind to bestow it upon him, i. e. to exercise it in his service; in other words, they are essentially of the world, with none but worldly objects, wholly governed by worldly wisdom, and hence are antichristian in their true character and influence; for political powers, no

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less than individual souls, that are not with the Lord, are against Him, and doomed to destruction:

> The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish;
> Yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted (Is. lx. 12).

This idea is still further developed in the statement, that 'they will war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them; for He is Lord of lords and King of kings'; which is often repeated, and always implies that He will subdue all the political powers, and destroy them as antichristian, or cause them to acknowledge and serve Him as their true head and Lord paramount. Moreover, the time of their warfare against Him will be short, being here prophetically measured as 'one hour.' For His victory over them is made swift and sure by the character of those whom He leads in the battle, who are not only the 'called,' but also 'chosen and faithful': "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Mat. xxii. 14). These ideas will be copiously unfolded in the sequel.

15 And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the harlot sitteth, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.

Here the symbolization returns to the harlot as sitting upon 'the many waters,' which the angel interprets in the sense of all the nations of the world and their populations, the enumeration of four particulars having its constant symbolical meaning of universality. The same idea is represented by her sitting upon the beast of antichristian political power, just as we have seen all this exemplified in the vast temporal dominion of the papacy.

16 And the ten horns which thou sawest and the beast, these shall hate the harlot, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her up with fire: 17 for God hath put it into their hearts to do His mind, and to be of one mind, and to give their kingdoms unto the beast, until the words of God shall be accomplished.

In this striking symbol we have represented the ultimate consequences to the harlot church of her adulterous union with the world, in that her lovers themselves come to hate and destroy her, as in the following prophecies:

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O harlot, hear the word of the Lord . . .
I will gather all thy lovers . . . against thee on every side . . .
I will also give thee into their hand;
And they . . . shall break down thy high places;
And they shall strip thee of thy clothes,
And shall take away thy fair jewels,
And shall leave thee naked and bare . . .
And they shall stone thee with stones,
And thrust thee through with their swords;
And they shall burn thy houses with fire,
And shall execute judgments upon thee . . .
And I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot,
And thou shalt also give no hire any more (Ez. xvi. 35–43).

Thus the secular powers, under the overruling providence of God, will be united to execute His purposes upon the harlot; for He will put it into their hearts to be of one mind in this matter, until His prophetic denunciations against this harlot corruption of the church shall be fully accomplished; after which they themselves shall go into perdition with the beast to whom they give their kingdoms, in order that the Lord's millennial kingdom may be established. Now, if we bear in mind that this beast is the symbol of antichristian political power, his ten horns, of the political organizations developed out of it, and the harlot, of that special form of antichristianity which is embodied in the apostate church, we shall see how the great antichristian world-power, which includes them all, becomes 'divided into three parts,' and falls into conflict with itself, in that the beast and his horns are made to hate and destroy the harlot (323). Also, in this division of the world-power against itself we see, in all probability, what is meant by the drying up of the Euphrates under Babylon (319), whereby are cut off the sources of her wealth, power, and greatness. In fine, we can hardly fail to recognize in the late overthrow of the temporal power of the papacy by the political powers over which it formerly dominated, whereby they have made it 'naked and desolate,' at least the initial fulfilment of this grand prophecy (327).

18 And the woman whom thou sawest is the great city which hath a kingdom over the kings of the earth.

The woman has been already identified with Babylon by

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the name on her forehead, and with Rome by the seven mountains on which she sits; here also she is 'the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt' (225), apparently for the purpose of increased emphasis upon the idea, that what she represents, in the church as well as out of it, is the world in its alienation from God and hostility to the Lord's kingdom. The whole vision, however, requires us to discern in these words with which it concludes a special reference to papal Rome, as the most striking example ever known of this harlot corruption of the church. But this corruption is by no means confined to the church of Rome, for it prevails extensively also in the Protestant communions as evinced by their conformity to the world. Finally, the words, 'which hath a kingdom over the kings of the earth,' is almost a literal interpretation of what is symbolized by the woman riding upon the beast of antichristian political power, in pointed allusion to papal Rome in that dominion which she exercised over the nations.

1. Here, then, we are solemnly admonished that worldliness in the church is spiritual harlotry, which leads also to all manner of sexual impurities. For in this state of the church the pure and consecrated Bride of the Lamb, by whom she was chosen to share His throne and crown, and who ought ever to be in her eyes,

> The chiefest among ten thousand
> . . . altogether lovely (Can. v. 10–16),

forsakes her celestial Bridegroom, and betrays His honor by yielding herself to the adulterous embraces of the power that crucified Him. We cannot with impunity allow our affections to be thus alienated from Him and fixed upon 'the beggarly elements of this world' (Gal. iv. 9). He will surely visit 'the uncleannesses of her fornication' upon His adulterous spouse with fearful judgments, as in the words of God: "I will judge thee as women that break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will bring upon thee the blood of fury and jealousy" (Ez. xvi. 38). His jealousy will burn against her as a consuming fire; and 'He will not spare in the day of vengeance' (Prov. vi. 34–35).

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2. In view of what is disclosed in this vision, and, indeed, on almost every page of this book, we are forcibly reminded of St. Paul's admonitions to his son Timothy concerning those who would hold the form of godliness, denying its power: "But know thou this, that in the last days grievous times will come; for men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, implacable, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, puffed up, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding the form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof: from these also turn thou away" (2 Tim. ii. 1–5). Let us not shut our eyes, then, to that which is certain to come, and which seems already begun, lest we be involved in the uncleannesses of the harlot church, thus receiving the mark of the beast, and be engulfed in her fearful doom. At the same time, let us hold fast the assurance here and everywhere given us, that it shall be well with those who stand on the watch for their Lord's coming, and keep their garments clean (321).

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XXXIX

DESTRUCTION OF BABYLON DELIVERANCE OF THE CHURCH XVIII 1–24

We have had a pre-announcement of the fall of the great antichristian world-power (274), and now we are to have the full particulars of its overthrow and utter destruction, whereby the true church finally obtains deliverance from her bondage to the world. In these particulars there is evidently a synthesis of the two symbols under which this power has been represented, namely, that of a city and that of a woman, so that the imagery is sometimes more appropriate to one and sometimes to the other, although neither seems ever to be entirely left out of sight.

1 After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority, and the earth was lighted with his glory: 2 and he cried with a mighty voice, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great, and is become a habitation of devils, and a hold of every unclean spirit, and a hold of every unclean and hated bird: 3 for by the wine of the rage of her fornication all the nations have fallen; and with her the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the merchants of the earth became rich through the abundance of her luxury.

The great authority and mighty voice of this angel denote the importance of what he proclaims; and the lighting up of the earth with his glory signifies that the destruction of the antichristian world-power is for the transfiguration and glorification of human life: it may contain also an allusion to the universal preaching of the gospel, which immediately precedes the overthrow of Babylon (267), and which is the only light by which the earth can be spiritually illumined. This destruction, having been previously announced, is here

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represented as actually taking place, with a multitude of allusions to the prophecies concerning it, of which the following are examples:

> Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldee's pride,
> Shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.
> It shall never be inhabited,
> Neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation;
> Neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there;
> Neither shall shepherds make their flocks to lie down there:
> But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there;
> And their houses shall be full of doleful creatures;
> And ostriches shall dwell there,
> And satyrs shall dance there (Is. xiii. 19-22).
> The pelican and the porcupine shall possess it;
> And the owl and the raven shall dwell in it:
> And He shall stretch over it the line of confusion,
> And the plummet of emptiness . . .
> It shall be a habitation of jackals,
> A court for ostriches.
> The wild beast of the desert also shall meet with the howling creatures,
> And the satyr shall cry to his fellow;
> Yea, the night monster shall settle there,
> And shall find for itself a place of rest.
> There shall the arrowsnake make her nest,
> And lay and hatch and gather under her shadow;
> Yea, there shall the vultures be gathered,
> Everyone with her mate (xxxiv. 10-15).

The one idea which underlies all these prophecies is that of utter ruin, perpetual desolation, and beyond this they need not be pressed. Their typical fulfilment in the destruction of the city of Babylon is also itself a prophecy of their anti-typical fulfilment in that of the world-power which Babylon represents. The reason given for this tremendous judgment is, that 'by the wine of the rage of her fornication all the nations have fallen,' i. e. Babylon is fallen, because she caused all the nations to fall, or become corrupted to their ruin (274): also, because 'with her the kings of the earth have committed fornication'; wherein there is a pointed allusion to the adulterous union of the harlot church with the secular powers (328): and because the merchants of the earth, the ministers to her enormous luxury, have thereby become rich and corrupt.

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4 And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye partake not of her sins, and receive not of her plagues. 5 For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. 6 Render unto her as she hath rendered, and double unto her according to her works: in the cup which she hath mingled mingle unto her double: 7 how much she hath glorified herself, and waxed wanton, so much torment and sorrow give her. For she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and sorrow I shall not see. 8 Therefore, in one day shall her plagues come, death and mourning and famine, and she shall be utterly burned up with fire: for strong is the Lord God who hath judged her.

This voice from heaven is to be recognized as that of God by the command given to His people, that they shall now come forth and separate themselves from the world, for their long promised deliverance is at hand. But it is not clear how much of what follows is thus spoken from heaven, for it is hardly consistent with propriety that the whole of it, especially the long poetic lamentations over Babylon, should come immediately from the mouth of God. Therefore, I venture to suggest that only the fourth verse is delivered by this voice, and that all the rest of the vision is in the inspired language of the Seer. This deliverance of the church from bondage to the world is one principal object of all these judgments, as well as of those in which it is typically represented, that of Noah by the deluge, the escape of Lot from Sodom, of Israel from Egypt, their return from Babylon, and the flight of the Christians from Jerusalem, when it was about to be destroyed; concerning which last the Lord gave them the following injunction: "When, therefore, ye shall see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . . then let them that are in Judea flee unto the mountains; and let him that is upon the housetop not come down to take the things that are in his house, neither let him that is in the field return back to take his clothes" (Mat. xxiv. 15–18). It was in similar words that the angel commanded Lot to flee out of Sodom: "Escape for thy life, look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain,

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lest thou be consumed" (Gen. xix. 17): so also God said to His people in the literal Babylon: "My people, go ye out of the midst of her, and deliver ye every man his soul from the fierce anger of the Lord (Jer. li. 45). Be not ye cut off in her iniquity; for it is the time of the Lord's vengeance, and He will render unto her a recompense" (li. 6). The motives for their flight, both in type and antitype, are the same, namely, that they may not be partakers in her sins, nor involved in her punishment. For her sins have reached unto heaven, i. e. even to the throne of God, and thus forced themselves, as it were, upon His remembrance, so that He can no longer delay to punish them. Moreover, this separation and breach between His people and the harlot is such that it can never be healed, for they are to be His instruments in her punishment and destruction: they are to render unto her double for all her works; the cup which she has mingled for them they are to mingle for her; her self-glorification and wantonness are the measure of the torment and sorrow which they are to give her: in all which, of course, no unchristian retaliation is intended, for the harlot is the personification of a system of iniquity which it is the bounden duty of all Christians to hate and destroy. Meanwhile, she has no premonition of her impending doom, but continues to felicitate herself upon the greatness and stability of her prosperity and glory, saying in her heart, 'I sit a queen, and am no widow, and sorrow I shall not see'; for her overthrow shall come when it is least expected, 'death,' i. e. pestilence (132), and mourning and famine and burning up with fire; all which are to be taken as cumulative expressions of her utter destruction. And what makes it sure and complete is, that she has been already condemned by Him whose power is adequate to effect it, 'for strong is the Lord God who hath judged her.'

9 And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and waxed wanton with her, shall weep and wail for her, when they see the smoke of her burning; 10 standing afar off for fear of her torment, saying, Woe, woe, the great city Babylon, the mighty city, for in one hour is thy judgment come!

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This is the first of three great lamentations over the destruction of the harlot world-power from the three classes who have been most deeply implicated in her earthly greed and idolatry, who have most profited by her luxury and wantonness, who have been the instruments of her vices and crimes; for they discern in her overthrow a premonition of their own, inasmuch as they also are of the world, and must be involved in its punishment. The first of these classes is that of 'the kings of the earth,' representing here, as elsewhere, the secular governments, which have been the instruments of the world-power in its conquests, oppressions, and shedding of innocent blood, especially that of the saints, and which have been adulterously connected with the harlot church. These are symbolically represented as standing afar off for fear of her torment, which notwithstanding they cannot escape, weeping and wailing and beating their breasts (16) over the suddenness and completeness of her destruction, 'saying, Woe, woe, the great city Babylon, the mighty city, for in one hour is thy judgment come'! This lament and those that follow are intended to bring out the identity of interest, character, and destiny between the world-power and those who have been its instruments.

11 And the merchants of the earth weep and lament for her, because no man buyeth their lading any more: 12 lading of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet; and every sweet-smelling wood, and every vessel of ivory, and every vessel of most precious wood, and of brass and of iron and of marble; 13 and cinnamon and spice and incense and ointment and frankincense and wine and oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep and horses and chariots and bodies and souls of men. 14 And the fruit-time of the lust of thy soul hath departed from thee, and all the splendid and sumptuous things have perished from thee, and they shall find them no more at all. 15 The merchants of these things, who became rich by her, shall stand afar off for fear of her torment, weeping and lamenting, 16 saying, Woe, woe, the great city, that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls; 17 for in one hour hath so great riches been made a desolation!

The merchants of the earth here represent a great part of

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the industrial world; the rest of it will be introduced in the next lament. In both it is regarded as completely secularized, alienated from the service of God, and employed in ministering to luxury and wantonness. This particular enumeration of so many and various elements of merchandise represents the enormous luxury of unsanctified wealth: and it is not a little significant that trading in these things, when it becomes thus secularized and ministrant to luxury, is here placed in the same category with making merchandise of 'the bodies and souls of men,' i. e. with the slave trade. The merchants of all these things, having become rich and corrupt in their service of the world, to which they belong, weep and lament over its destruction, as involving their own, in nearly the same words as the kings, 'because no man buyeth their lading any more.' In both these laments there are special references to the harlot church, and here, especially, in the words, 'that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls,' which are appropriate to a woman rather than to a city; and this, apparently, to emphasize the idea that her destruction is necessarily included in that of the great world-power with which she has identified herself.

17 And every shipmaster, and every one that saileth anywhither, and mariners, and as many as are toilers of the sea stood afar off, 18 and cried out, seeing the smoke of her burning, saying, What [city] is like unto the great city! 19 And they cast dust upon their heads, and cried out, weeping and lamenting, saying, Woe, woe, the great city, by which all that had ships in the sea became rich from her costliness; for in one hour hath she been made a desolation!

A similar lament from those engaged in maritime commerce, with a like significance. But it is a great puzzle to most Protestant commentators, who generally regard Babylon as another name for the papacy or the city of Rome; which it cannot be in any exclusive sense, for the reason, among others, that this lament has no special appropriateness upon that supposition. Thus Dean Alford: "The character of this lamentation throws a shade of doubt over the interpretation [that Rome exclusively is intended] . . . For

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Rome never has been, and from its very position never could be, a great commercial city. . . . The details of this lamentation far more nearly suit London than Rome, at any assignable period of her history." Then, with his beautiful simplicity and accustomed frankness (great qualities of a true scholar) he adds, "I leave this difficulty unsolved." But the interpretation given in this work, that Babylon is the symbol of the antichristian world-power, which is nowhere more fully present than in secularized commerce, both by land and by sea, and that these laments regard papal Rome only in a subordinate manner, and not so much as a city, but rather as a harlot church in adulterous union with the world, completely solves this difficulty, and is thereby strongly confirmed. For it is not Rome exclusively that here fills the eye of the Seer, but the great antichristian world, as represented in Rome, London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, Moscow, New York, and in all 'the cities of the nations' whose fall is involved in that of Babylon (323).

20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and ye saints and apostles and prophets, for God hath judged your judgment upon her.

In the strongest contrast with the preceding lamentations is this call upon the heavenly host, upon the saints, apostles, and prophets, to rejoice over the destruction of the harlot world-power: the particular reason given for which is, that God has now executed upon her that judgment which they in all ages have predicted or anticipated, and which rights all the wrongs she has ever inflicted. For this judgment is contained in all the prophecies concerning the typical destruction of the historic Babylon, and the typical deliverance of the Old Testament church, where also it is an occasion of similar rejoicing:

> Sing, O heavens, for the Lord hath done it;
> Shout, ye lower parts of the earth;
> Break forth into singing, ye mountains,
> O forest, and every tree therein:
> For the Lord hath redeemed Jacob,
> And will glorify himself in Israel (Is. xlix. 23).
> Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth,
> And break forth into singing, O mountains:

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For the Lord hath comforted His people,
And will have compassion upon His afflicted (xlix. 13).

For the destruction of the world-power, though it be regarded by those who have been corrupted with luxury and wantonness as a measureless calamity, is in truth the greatest of blessings, because it is the realization of divine justice, and indispensable to the deliverance of the church from bondage, and to the final establishment of the Lord's kingdom. Hence He says to His people: "When these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke xxi. 28).

21 And a mighty angel took up a stone, as it were a great millstone, and hurled it into the sea, saying, Thus with sudden violence shall Babylon the great city be hurled, and shall be found no more.

In this symbolical transaction the sudden violence with which the great antichristian world-power shall be overthrown and made to disappear forever is strikingly represented, in pointed allusion to the following prophecy: "When thou hast made an end of reading this book, thou shalt bind a stone unto it, and shalt cast it into Euphrates; and thou shalt say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again, because of the evil that I will bring upon her" (Jer. li. 63–64).

22 And the voice of harpers and of minstrels and of flute players and trumpeters shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman of any craft shall be found any more at all in thee; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee; 23 and the light of a lamp shall shine no more at all in thee; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee. For thy merchants were the great ones of the earth; for with thy sorcery all the nations of the earth were deceived: 24 and in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain in sacrifice upon the earth.

Here the utter ruin or desolation of the literal Babylon, as foretold by the prophets, as it was in the time of St. John, and as it has continued for almost 2,000 years since, is taken to represent the overthrow and destruction of the antichristian world-power of the last times: and all these particulars

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are significant, showing that within its limits there will be no festivity, no art, no form of industry, no household life, and no source of population; and all this in allusion to innumerable prophecies, of which the following is a single example:

> I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness,
> The voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride,
> The sound of the millstones and the light of the candle (Jer. xxv. 10).

The vision closes with the three great crimes for which, above all others, the harlot world-power is thus judged and punished: (1) Her enormous luxury, as signified by the fact, that her merchants, the ministers to her wantonness, 'were the great ones of the earth,' those who filled the most exalted stations, and had the greatest power and influence: (2) Her having seduced by her sorceries, or meretricious solicitations, all the nations, governments, political powers of mankind into rebellion against God, and, as the harlot church, having taken them into adulterous union with herself, and made them the instruments of her vices and crimes: (3) Her bloody persecution of prophets and saints, and of all who have ever been sacrificed in the cause of truth and right, whose blood is now required at her hands.

1. We see here what is meant by 'the end of the world' in the Scriptural sense of that expression; for it does not mean the close of man's history upon earth, but the end of his rebellion against God, including the destruction of all antichristian political and ecclesiastical powers, and the deliverance of the true church from their enslaving and corrupting influences. Moreover, in strict analogy with prophecy in general, it may include a series of sudden events (20); for much of what is here predicted takes place, as we shall see, previously to, and in preparation for, the establishment of the Lord's millennial kingdom; but it is not consummated until the issue of the last battle subsequently to the millennium, which is immediately followed by the final judgment and the descent of the New Jerusalem from heaven to earth.

2. Further, I venture to suggest that this destruction of the world-power under the symbol of Babylon consumed by

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fire, may be identical with what is elsewhere spoken of as a conflagration of the earth, in which, as it has been commonly believed, the physical world will be literally burned up: for otherwise this catastrophe does not appear at all in these visions, and it seems impossible to account for its omission. If this identification be correct, it may lead to a figurative, in place of the literal interpretation which has generally prevailed, of such prophecies as the following: "The heavens that are now and the earth . . . are treasured up for fire, being reserved against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. . . . The day of the Lord shall come as a thief, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (2 Pet. iii. 7–10). For such a figurative interpretation of these prophecies would not weaken in the least, much less invalidate, the practical exhortations which are based upon them, such as the following: "Seeing that all these things are thus to be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy living and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the day of God, by reason of which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat! But we according to His promise look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness" (iii. 11–13).

3. In conclusion, the unparalleled fulness with which the overthrow of the antichristian world-power is represented, both by pre-announcement and description in detail, shows its enormous importance in the scheme of divine providence. Moreover, inasmuch as it includes the deliverance of the church from bondage to the world, and the suppression of evil, it is, as we have seen, and as will more fully appear in the next vision, a subject of great rejoicing in heaven, and should be an object of longing desire and unceasing prayer with all the people of God: for when finally delivered from this bondage, 'then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear' (Mat. xiii. 43).

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XL

JUBILATE IN HEAVEN OVER THE JUDGMENT OF THE WORLD POWER THE PURIFICATION OF THE CHURCH AND THE MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB XIX 1–10

In this vision, as in others where a corresponding stage has been reached (228), we have a jubilation in heaven over the destruction of the antichristian world-power, the consequent deliverance and purification of the church, and her marriage with the Lamb.

1 After these things I heard as it were the great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, Hallelujah, the salvation and the glory and the power of our God! 2 For true and just are His judgments, for He hath judged the great harlot, who corrupted the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand.

This voice is that of the whole heavenly host, including the saved, who have come safely through 'the great tribulation,' and whom we have seen and heard as 'a great multitude which no man could number,' shouting, 'The salvation be unto our God, who sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb' (159). Here with their great voice they exclaim at the glory of God, the great salvation, and the power by which it has been wrought out, and celebrate the truth and justice of His judgments as manifested in the means He has employed, i. e. the destruction of the harlot world-power who corrupted the earth with her fornication. Hence they see in her overthrow the hand of God avenging the blood of His servants upon her; as God said to Jehu: "Thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the

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servants of the Lord, at the hand of Jezebel" (2 Ki. ix. 7). Moreover, their joy and triumph are such that the Hebrew word Hallelujah, signifying 'Praise ye the Lord,' which occurs nowhere else in this book, nor in the New Testament, bursts forth from their lips. We shall see also in what immediately follows, that it is repeated four times, to denote the universality of this praise (114), and with reference, no doubt, to its fourfold repetition in that series of Psalms which was sung at the feast of the Passover in commemoration of the typical deliverance of the Old Testament church from the bondage in Egypt:

Praise ye the Lord . . .
Who is like unto the Lord our God,
Who hath His seat on high! . . .
Praise ye the Lord. . . .
When Israel went forth out of Egypt . . .
The sea saw it and fled . . .
Praise ye the Lord,
For His mercy is great toward us,
And the truth of the Lord is forever.
Praise ye the Lord (Ps. cxiii.-cxvii.).

Hence this word now becomes the fourfold shout of the heavenly host for God's true and just judgment upon the antichristian world-power of the last times, and for the antitypical deliverance of His people from its persecutions and corruptions.

3 And a second time they have said Hallelujah: and her smoke goeth up forever and ever. 4 And the four and twenty elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God who sitteth upon the throne, saying, Amen, Hallelujah.

This smoke is that of the burning of Babylon (342), and its going up forever and ever signifies that her destruction is such that from it she can never rise again. Here the elders and living creatures again fall down and worship God (115), and give their solemn response of 'Amen' and 'Hallelujah,' to signify that all the holy angels (113), and the whole world of nature (110), take part in this rejoicing and praise to God for His judgment upon the world-power.

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5 And a voice came forth from the throne, saying, Give praise unto our God, all ye His servants that fear Him, the small and the great.

This voice from the throne cannot be that of God, for He could not speak of Himself as 'our God.' The only solution of this difficulty that I can suggest is, that His throne here stands for heaven, as we have had it before (339), and as in the words: "Heaven is my throne (Is. lxvi. 1). Swear not at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne" (Mat. v. 34). If this be so, the throne, or heaven, from which this voice proceeds, may be understood in the sense of all who dwell in heaven, who could appropriately call upon all the servants of God of every degree to praise Him for this great deliverance, saying, 'Give praise unto our God.' It must be acknowledged, however, that this is not altogether satisfactory. But by whomsoever this call is made, it certainly has the authority of God, which His throne always represents.

6 And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah, for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth: 7 let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and we will give the glory unto Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready.

In response to the preceding call from the throne, this perfect storm of jubilation, with a strength and density of sound like the voice of a great multitude, of many waters, and of mighty thunders, bursts forth, as it would seem, from all the servants of God throughout the universe, including angels, men, and nature, in which they cause to re-echo for the fourth time the sacred Hallelujah, for that the Lord their God, by His almighty power, has taken unto Himself His kingdom, and has come to reign over the world no longer in rebellion against Him (229). They rejoice and are exceeding glad, and give Him all the glory of this destruction of the world-power which corrupted the earth, not only for its own sake, but also and chiefly as indispensable to the deliverance and purification of the church, who now comes forth and presents herself, in the strongest contrast with the

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harlot, as the chaste Bride of the Lamb, having purified, and thus 'made herself ready' for her espousals. The immense importance of this transaction is signified by this rejoicing over it.

8 And it was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright [and] pure; for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints.

The Bride is, of course, the true church in her unity, receptivity, and motherhood (233): and the Seer places before us the simplicity of her attire, in contrast with the meretricious adornment of the harlot (327), and interprets for us its symbolical meaning. For it consists of a robe of fine linen, which, by its purity and glistering brightness, fitly represents 'the righteousnesses' of the saints: the word being plural perhaps to denote a righteousness for every saint, but more probably, I think, the various circumstances and conditions in which their righteousness manifests itself. Properly it signifies righteous judgments or actions; which, together with the fact, that the Bride 'arrays herself,' and that the saved 'wash their own robes and make them white in the blood of the Lamb' (160), may denote that this righteousness is not something barely external, legal, forensic, but something which the saints appropriate to themselves, which informs and purifies their lives, and constitutes their inmost character (85): yet, as represented by a garment 'given' unto them (140), and in which it is 'given' unto the Bride to array herself, it reminds us that it was not originally their own, but is, indeed, 'the righteousness which is of God by faith' (Phil. iii. 9).

9 And he saith unto me, Write: Blessed are they who are bidden unto the marriage supper of the Lamb: and he saith unto me, These are the true words of God.

There is a certain abruptness in the introduction of this speaker, which, however, will not seem strange if we take him to be the interpreting angel of a former vision (329), of whose continued presence the Seer is so conscious that he

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does not feel the need of informing us who he is: and what renders this the more probable is, that he will appear hereafter in a similar abrupt manner (Rev. xxii. 6). His command to write what he now delivers emphasizes its importance for the church in all subsequent ages, as in other similar cases (291). The marriage of the Lamb represents that consummation of the mystical union of the Lord with His church which will take place when she shall have purified herself from the corruptions and defilements of the world, and in consequence of which she will be forever one with Him in His life and throne and crown and glory. They who are bidden to the marriage-supper are the saints regarded in a different aspect from that in which they constitute the Bride, i. e. as individuals, those who are represented as having the wedding garment (Mat. xxii. 11), and as the wise virgins, in the Lord's parables (xxv. 1). The declaration of the angel, 'These are the true words of God,' are for emphasis upon the blessing He has just pronounced upon the wedding guests.

10 And I fell at his feet to worship him: and he saith unto me, See [thou do it] not: I am a fellow-servant with thee, and with thy brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.

The angel, having made such wonderful disclosures of the invisible world, and of the future history of the church, and thus solemnly affirming that his words are the true words of God, impresses the Seer with such deep spiritual awe that he falls at his feet to worship him. But the angel forbids him, declaring that he is only a fellow-servant with the Seer and with all his brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus. His being commissioned to deliver such wonderful revelations does not make him a proper object of worship, for the same Spirit of prophecy by whom they are inspired dwells in all who hold this testimony, whether angels or men, and they are all fellow-servants and brethren to each other (238). The abruptness of the angel's words in the original, 'See—not,' expresses his eagerness and haste to guard his

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fellow-servant from the error and sin of 'worshipping the angels' (Col. ii. 18).

Thus we see how great a cause of rejoicing to all the servants of God will be the destruction of the world-power, regarded as indispensable to the deliverance and purification of the church, and to the consummation of her espousals with her celestial Bridegroom. In the meantime, it is for us to array ourselves in the wedding garment of a pure and holy life, which yet is His gift, in order that we may be welcome guests and partakers in these marriage solemnities. And it is for us to watch and keep our lamps trimmed and burning: for when the Bridegroom comes, there will be foolish virgins who will have no oil in their lamps, who will not be permitted to go in with Him to the marriage, and who, standing without in the midnight darkness, will cry in vain, 'Lord, Lord, open unto us,' and to whom He will say, 'I know you not.' Ah, the sorrow of all such; with what pathos has it been portrayed by a great poet of our time!

Late, late, so late; and dark the night and chill:
Late, late, so late; but we can enter still.
Too late, too late; ye cannot enter now.
No light had we; for that we do repent;
And, learning this, the Bridegroom will relent.
Too late, too late; ye cannot enter now.
No light, so late; and dark and chill the night:
O let us in that we may find the light.
Too late, too late; ye cannot enter now.
Have we not heard the Bridegroom is so sweet!
O let us in that we may kiss His feet.
No, no, too late; ye cannot enter now.

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XLI

THE COMING OF THE LORD FROM HEAVEN WITH HIS ARMIES TO SUBDUE THE NATIONS XIX 11–16

In this vision we have a truly sublime and picturesque representation of the Lord coming forth from heaven, with His celestial armies, to complete the suppression of the world's rebellion, and to take possession of the conquered nations. Thus He fulfils a multitude of prophecies, many of which have been already quoted (78). But as this is the dominant idea of the Apocalypse throughout (16), what is here represented is to be regarded as its consummation or crowning fulfilment.

11 And I saw heaven opened, and, behold, a white horse, and He that sat upon him, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness doth He judge and make war.

The Seer, being in the state of ecstatic vision (26), sees an opening in the sky, as a symbol of the revelation of the invisible world that follows. Of course, we cannot understand that any opening in the void space above the earth actually took place. As little can we understand that the Lord will ever come from heaven riding literally upon a white horse. It would be quite unnecessary to say this, if it were not for the intense literalism of some eminent commentators, who strenuously maintain that His coming, as here represented, must be a personal and visible one. But it seems far better to interpret what is said in this place, as in others, in accordance with the symbolical character of the whole book. For such riding upon white horses is the constant symbol of victory and triumph, as in the Roman pomps

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(135); and it is with this significance that the Lord is so represented here; also, as in the case of the ministers of His four sore judgments who also ride upon horses (129), to denote that His attacks upon the nations will now be rapid and irresistible. There is also a plain allusion here, and it runs through the whole vision, to the following prophecy:

> Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O Mighty One,
> Thy glory and thy majesty:
> And in thy majesty ride prosperously,
> Because of truth and meekness [and] righteousness;
> And let thy right hand teach thee terrible things (Ps. xlv. 3-4).

For now 'the Lord will execute [His] word upon the earth, finishing it and cutting it short' (Rom. ix. 28). His names, 'Faithful and True,' are significant of His absolute truth and fidelity to all His engagements, to His threatenings no less than to His promises, as in such declarations as the following: "Jesus, who was faithful to Him that appointed Him (Heb. iii. 2). We know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John v. 20). The war which He comes to make is 'in righteousness,' against 'all ungodliness of men' (Rom. i. 18), for the realization of truth and justice upon earth, as in the prophecies:

> Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice . . .
> Before the Lord, for He cometh;
> For He cometh to judge the earth:
> He will judge the world with righteousness,
> And the peoples with His truth (Ps. xcvi. 11-13).
> With righteousness will He judge the poor,
> And reprove with equity for the meek of the earth:
> And He will smite the earth with the rod of His mouth;
> And with the breath of His lips will He slay the wicked:
> And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins,
> And faithfulness the girdle of His reins (Is. xi. 4-5).
> He will judge among the nations;
> He will fill [the places] with the dead bodies;
> He will strike through the head in many countries (Ps. cx. 6).

These prophecies, indeed, cover the whole ground of His mediatorial government, but they have, no doubt, a special reference to this closing war.

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12 And His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems, and He hath a name written which no one knoweth but Himself.

His eyes are a flame of fire, as in the opening vision (35), and with the same significance, that of His piercing discernment of the secrets of men's hearts (36), also of His justice and burning zeal against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. The many diadems on His head symbolize the same truth that is more literally expressed in His title, 'King of kings and Lord of lords'; a truth which runs through the whole Scripture (332), and is frequently referred to in these visions; namely, that He is the Lord paramount over all secular governments; that all their legitimate authority and powers are derived and held from Him, and consequently ought always to be exercised in His name: in fact, the rebellion of the nations which He now comes from heaven to suppress largely consists in their withholding from Him this honor.* As to His name 'which no one knoweth but Himself,' that it cannot be known does not refer to its outward form, for it is expressly said to be 'written,' which implies that it can be read; but what is meant is, that its meaning is inscrutable to finite minds; and hence we may probably conjecture that it is the 'Son of God'; for the mysterious import of this name He Himself informs us is known to none besides Himself but God the Father: "No one knoweth the Son save the Father" (Mat. xi. 27). Thus we are instructed that the sonship of the second Person of the Holy Trinity is a sacred mystery, which, however much we may see in it, signifies more than we can ever comprehend. We may be assured, however, that it includes participation in the divine nature after a transcendent manner, for if the Son were a mere man, this name could be understood by men.

13 And he is clothed in a vesture dipped in blood, and His name is called the Word of God.

This blood is commonly understood by the commentators

* For a large discussion of this subject see *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, xix.

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to be that of His enemies, as in the prophecy which has been referred to:

> **Who is this that cometh from Edom,**
> **With dyed garments from Bozrah ? (303).**

But to this it may be objected, that here He is represented as coming from heaven to execute justice upon His incorrigible enemies, and consequently He has not yet stained His raiment with their blood. It seems better, therefore, to understand that this blood is His own, which was shed to atone for the sins of mankind. His vesture which is dipped in it, or, as in some manuscripts, sprinkled with it, may be taken as the symbol of His humanity, which He put on as a garment in His incarnation. It is, then, in His crucified human nature that He now rides forth from the portals of heaven to conquer the world. The name here given Him, 'the Word of God,' occurs nowhere but in St. John's writings, and it completely identifies this conqueror with the divine 'Logos' of the fourth Gospel, especially in its proem: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God: the same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us; and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John i. 1–14). The meaning of this name may be partly expressed in the following particulars: (1) Christ is the manifestation of God, as the word or speech of a man manifests him to others: (2) He is 'the Messenger of the covenant' (Mal. iii. 1), through whom God delivers His word to mankind: (3) As God incarnate He speaks the words of God with absolute authority, as where it is said: "He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Mat. vii. 29). Yet these particulars do by no means exhaust the significance of this great name, which, like that of the Son of God, is a divine mystery.

14 And the armies which are in heaven followed Him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen white [and] pure.

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He rides forth at the head of a triumphal procession, being followed by the armies of heaven, who also ride upon white horses, and are clothed in fine linen white and pure, to denote their purity of character, and that their victory and triumph in the war are already assured (85). In these visions both saints and angels are thus arrayed, to signify that they are victorious over their temptations and spiritual enemies, and are pure from the defilements of sin (111). Hence these celestial armies may be understood to include both these classes of holy beings, and certainly that of the redeemed, 'for the fine linen is the righteousnesses of the saints' (349); who, having warred in the cause of their King during their earthly lives, now come forth from heaven, as 'the called and chosen and faithful' (331), to share His triumph and glory. In fine, it was concerning this spiritual transaction that "Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, Behold, the Lord came, with ten thousand of His holy ones, to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their works of ungodliness which they have ungodly wrought, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him" (Jude 14–15).

15 And out of His mouth goeth forth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations; and He will shepherd them with a rod of iron; and He treadeth the winepress of the wine of the anger of the wrath of God Almighty.

This sharp sword of His mouth is repeated from the opening vision with the same significance (37), except that here its double edge seems intentionally left out, perhaps to denote that the gracious function of the word, in slaying the enmity of souls and saving them, is not to be prominent in these last times when their probation is well-nigh closed, and that its other function in the execution of divine justice is now to prevail. Yet the fact, that the Lord is represented with this sword, and similarly in other particulars, both at the opening and so near the close of the book, confirms the view, that this vision covers the ground of the whole dispensation, though doubtless with special reference to His com-

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ing at the establishment of His millennial kingdom. That 'He will shepherd the nations with a rod of iron' is repeated from the Epistle to the church in Thyatira (78), and from the vision of the great red dragon, where its meaning has been given (236). The fulness of expression in His 'treading the winepress of the wine of the anger of the wrath of God Almighty' is terribly emphatic; in which there are references to the punishment of great Babylon (323), and to the vintage of the earth, where these awful symbols have been already explained (303).

16 And He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

This great name or title expresses in words the precise idea that is so picturesquely symbolized by the many diadems upon His head (354). It is written both upon His vesture and upon His thigh, the former of which, as we have just seen (356), represents His humanity, and the latter frequently occurs as a symbol of the inmost source and strength of human life, as where it is said: "The souls belonging unto Jacob that came into Egypt, which came out of his thigh (Gen. xlvi. 26). And he [Samson] smote them [the Philistines] hip and thigh with a great slaughter" (Judges xv. 8). Hence we may understand that this name, as written upon the Lord's vesture and thigh, denotes that His authority over the nations and their governments belongs inseparably to His human nature, by the offering of which in sacrifice to God He acquired the right and power to rule them, and to be acknowledged in all governmental acts as their Lord paramount. This idea, moreover, is beautifully set forth by St. Paul as follows: "Jesus Christ . . . being made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, yea, the death of the cross: wherefore, God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him the name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus

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Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. ii. 5–11).

Thus we are given to see, with the eyes of our faith, the Lord coming from heaven, as the true and faithful One, as the Son and the Word of God, as the King of kings and Lord of lords, with the tokens of His crucified humanity, and the insignia of His royal paramount authority, followed by His celestial armies, to subdue the world unto Himself, and to execute summary punishment upon His incorrigible enemies. But whether this is to be a visible manifestation or not, is much disputed by the commentators (17). I shall not undertake positively to decide this controversy. Yet it seems to me that they who maintain that it must necessarily be visible do labor under the greater difficulties. For, as we have seen, there are reasons for believing that the vision is intended to cover the whole, or a great part, of the dispensation; besides which the literalism of such a visible appearance seems hardly consistent with the laws of symbolic interpretation; and what reason can be given for it which does not equally require that the Lord should literally ride forth from heaven on a white horse, with a sword coming out of His mouth, and followed by His saints and angels also riding upon white horses? Therefore, it seems better to understand that what is here symbolized includes all the manifestations of Himself by which He establishes His kingdom in the world, yet with special reference to those of the last times. For thus we shall derive the greatest help from it in our struggles and conflicts with the evil that is in the world, seeing here that our all-conquering Lord, with all the armies of heaven, is present with us, and that, while we trust in His truth and faithfulness, our victory and triumph over all our spiritual enemies are assured.

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XLII

FINAL JUDGMENT UPON THE BEAST AND THE FALSE PROPHET UPON THE ANTICHRISTIAN POLITICAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL POWERS XIX 17–21

This vision is to be comprehended as a further unfolding of what is summarily contained in the preceding destruction of the great antichristian world-power under the symbol of Babylon (337). For the beast and the false prophet, representing antichristianity as embodied in political and ecclesiastical forms, are particulars included in that power, and go down with it, in order to the establishment of the Lord's millennial kingdom. Here they are represented as in union with each other, and gathering all their forces to make head against Him, as He comes forth from heaven with His celestial armies. But He overcomes them, and they are cast into the lake of fire, whilst their deluded followers are slain with the sword that comes forth out of His mouth. It is quite evident that every particular of the vision is loaded with significance.

17 And I saw an angel standing in the sun: and he cried with a great voice, saying to all the birds that fly in midheaven, Come hither, be gathered together unto the great supper of God; 18 that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains of thousands, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit upon them, and the flesh of all, free as well as bond, both small and great.

Various reasons, all more or less unsatisfactory, have been assigned for this angel's station in the sun; as that the catastrophe which he announces starts from the centre of the cosmical system; that his glory may correspond to the great-

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ness of his mission; that his voice may be heard by all the birds flying in midheaven: to which I venture to add another, which may not be much better, namely, that, as his proclamation is one of judgment and slaughter, he stands in the sun viewed as the source of destructive forces (318). He calls all the birds of prey to come together to 'the great supper of God,' i. e. to the feast which God is about to provide for them in the execution of His justice upon the armies of the beast and false prophet. Similar representations are frequent in the prophets:

> And thou, son of man, thus saith the Lord God:
> Speak unto the birds of every sort,
> And to every beast of the field:
> Assemble yourselves and come:
> Gather yourselves on every side
> Unto my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you,
> Even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel,
> That ye may eat flesh and drink blood.
> Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty,
> And drink the blood of the princes of the earth,
> Of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks,
> All of them fatlings of Bashan.
> And ye shall eat fat till ye be full,
> And drink blood till ye be drunken . . .
> And ye shall be filled at my table with horses and with chariots,
> With mighty men, and with all men of war,
> Saith the Lord God.
> And I will set my glory among the nations,
> And all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed,
> And my hand that I have laid upon them (Ez. xxxix. 17–21).

Our Lord also employs the same image of these judgments: "As the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall the coming of the Son of Man be: where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Mat. xxiv. 27). In these prophecies, as in the text, the birds of prey may be taken in their function as scavengers, to represent the purification of the earth from the moral corruptions of 'the flesh' of mankind; and the destruction of horses and chariots may be understood as representing that of all the means and instruments wherewith the earth destroyers have wrought their works of violence

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and bloodshed. But what is most worthy of attention is the appalling picture here set before us of this 'great sacrifice' in these judgments upon all sorts and conditions of men under the beast and false prophet. As to the vexed question, whether a literal slaughter or a spiritual judgment is here intended, this ought to be determined by the symbolical character of the whole book, and of this vision in particular. For it seems plain enough that we have no more reason to understand that what is here signified will be a literal slaughter than that an angel will actually stand in the sun, and call the birds to a feast, or that, when they come, they will eat 'chariots.' Beyond all reasonable doubt, what is here represented is mainly a spiritual judgment upon the evil that is in the world, by which it will be overthrown and destroyed, although this may involve a great destruction of human life.

19 And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make the war against Him that sat upon the horse and His army.

This beast is the one that represents antichristian secular power (244), upon which also the harlot rides (327), and these kings with their armies are the individual political governments with their subjects or citizens, which give their power to the beast, and war with him against the Lamb (331). The distinction between the beast and the kings seems to be, that the former symbolizes the idea, or spiritual power, and the latter the concrete realization of it. Their forces are now gathered together unto 'the war,' i. e. the final conflict preceding the millennium, which has been spoken of before (331). The Lord's 'army' is one, in contrast with their 'armies,' or tumultuous hosts. There is no description of the battle, perhaps to signify that it will be very short, with no doubtful issue; only the result is given as follows:

20 And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet, that wrought the signs before him, wherewith he deceived them that had the mark of the beast, and that worshipped his image: these two were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone.

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The false prophet is here completely identified with the beast that represents antichristian ecclesiastical power, as another symbol of the same idea, by the words, 'that wrought the signs before him,' for these very signs were wrought by that beast (254). Consequently his capture with 'the former beast' shows that these two forms of antichristianity have united their forces in this war, as, indeed, they have ever been in the closest alliance. The rapid passing over the conflict to the result symbolizes the overwhelming power which the Lord now brings to bear upon them, and the suddenness with which He subverts and abolishes all antichristian political and ecclesiastical organizations. But in what sense can it be said that these powers are 'cast alive into the lake of fire'? To this question any one of three different answers may be given: (1) The vivid personification of these powers is thus preserved, and their being cast into this lake may signify their utter destruction: (2) The beast and the false prophet may be taken as mere symbols of those persons who have upheld and exercised these antichristian powers, for which these persons, as living souls, are now cast into the lake: (3) The expression may be intended to imply that the beast and the false prophet are the symbols of two or more evil spirits, angels of Satan, by whom those two forms of antichristianity are animated (246), who are now literally cast alive into hell: and this last interpretation is confirmed by the analogy of the great red dragon, which is the symbol of Satan, and by the fact that he, as we shall see hereafter, is 'cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and the false prophet are' (Rev. xx. 10).

21 And the rest were slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which goeth forth out of His mouth, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

It can hardly be without significance that this striking distinction is made between these two powers, on the one hand, and their armies or followers, on the other. For it is not said that these last were cast into the lake of fire, but that

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they were slain with the sword of Him that sat upon the horse, which sword, we are significantly reminded, goes forth out of His mouth (356). Now this sword of His word necessarily has two functions, whether its two edges be mentioned, or not, one to save, the other to destroy (38). Hence we may understand that what is here intended is not altogether the execution of divine justice upon those who have been deceived by the signs and wiles of the false prophet; but that, to some extent at least, the saving function of the word may be exercised upon them, in slaying the old man, the carnal mind, in them, that is to say, 'their flesh'; in delivering them from the deceptions of the false prophet, whereby they have been seduced to receive his mark and worship his image; and in bringing them back to their true allegiance: for this would conform to the interpretation which has been given to the symbol of the birds being 'filled with their flesh' (360), namely, that of their being purified from moral corruptions. It may also be in this gracious sense that we are to understand the words of St. Paul: "For He must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet" (1 Cor. xv. 25). It must be conceded, however, that the vision, in its general character and scope, does not warrant us in regarding this gracious function of the sword going forth out of His mouth as prominent in this conflict: more consistently we may understand that these followers of the beast and false prophet are mostly slain by it in the sense that upon them are executed all its threatenings against the incorrigibly rebellious.

Thus we have seen in this series of visions the overthrow and destruction of the great antichristian world-power, and of its two principal offshoots or forms, political and ecclesiastical, and we are now prepared for the immediate ushering in, as in the next vision, of the millennial kingdom. These prophecies, however, have doubtless had a partial fulfilment in the overthrow of paganism, in the triumphs of the primitive church, in the Reformation, in the success of modern missions, and in every advance of Christianity. But the antichristian character and influence of the church of Rome,

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and of the governments of the so-called Christian nations; the selfishness by which they are still characterized, the deceitfulness of their diplomacy, the immensity of their military and naval armaments, the frequency and destructiveness of their wars with each other, and their oppression of feebler nations; the vast accumulations of wealth in comparatively few hands, the luxury of the rich, the little that has been accomplished in amelioration of the condition of the laboring masses, the multitudes who are still sunk in poverty and degradation, the prevalence of intemperance, vice, and misery, of social and political immorality, and of worldliness in all branches of the church: from all this it is quite certain that this final conflict with the beast and the false prophet, and the crowning fulfilment of these grand prophecies, are yet to come. Let us labor and pray without ceasing that they may be hastened, finding ever in the assured expectation of the result, as here predicted, our strength and consolation.

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XLIII

THE BINDING OF SATAN THE FIRST RESURRECTION THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM XX 1–6

In this vision we have a prophecy of the Lord's millennial kingdom, and other matters of the first importance, as all the commentators agree, but concerning the particulars of which there is the greatest diversity of opinion. Without going very deeply into these almost endless controversies, I propose to give here what seems to me the most probable.

1 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand: 2 and he laid hold upon the dragon, the old serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, 3 and cast him into the abyss, and shut it up, and sealed it over him; that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years should be accomplished: after that he must be loosed for a little time.

Although the Seer does not name this angel, yet we may not improbably recognize him as Michael, who, in the original war among the angels, conquered Satan, and expelled him from heaven (238). The abyss is a place of torment for Satan and his angels (180), and he formerly held the key of it (179), but now it seems he has been deprived of it, and it reappears in the hand of this angel; which may denote that a great repression of Satan's power has taken place in the destruction of Babylon, the beast, and the false prophet; and now he is to be shorn of what remains of it by being chained and shut up in his own place. The several names by which he is here characterized have occurred before (237). Elsewhere also he is called Apollyon, Abaddon, a star fallen from heaven, and the angel of the abyss, from which he lets

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loose the torments of human life (180); and we have seen him standing ready to devour the man-child which the woman should bring forth (236), persecuting her seed, giving his authority to the beast, and deceiving the whole world (241). But now he is bound with a great chain, which this angel has brought down from heaven with the key of the abyss, to denote that the power to restrain his influence comes immediately from God; and he is cast into his own place, and shut up in it, literally locked or keyed up, and it is sealed over him, so that he shall deceive the nations no more for a thousand years: after which he must be loosed for a short time.

The general meaning of this symbolical transaction is quite plain; for, of course, it can signify nothing less than that the power of Satan over mankind, with the evils which are the products of his agency, shall be mightily restrained and diminished during these thousand years; and this diminution must be understood as applying to the physical and mental diseases which now afflict mankind, the torments and miseries which he lets loose from the abyss (180). It is not probable, however, that these evils, together with sin in which they originate, will be altogether exterminated; otherwise sin could hardly ever break forth again, as we shall find that it does at the close of the thousand years. The length of this period will be considered hereafter. But that Satan, after being chained and shut up in the abyss, should ever be let loose again, is one of the greatest mysteries of the divine providence. We know, indeed, by our faith in God, that He must have the best reasons for it, but those reasons He has not seen fit to reveal to us, probably because we are incapable of appreciating them, and would not be able to bear them, as in the case of what 'the seven thunders spake' (197). In this, however, we have one of those numerous traits of the Canonical Scriptures which powerfully evince their divine origin; for if any uninspired author had undertaken to write such a book as this, we may be sure that having once got the devil chained and shut up in the abyss, he would have kept him there. In like manner, with respect

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to Abraham's lies, the fraud by which Jacob obtained the birthright and blessing of his brother, David's adultery, his murder of Uriah, Solomon's defection from the God of Israel, the stiff-necked perversity, stupidity, and idolatry of the covenant people: for it is quite certain that all such stains upon the glory of their covenant head, forefathers, and heroes would have been left out of the record by the national historians, if they had not been divinely inspired and controlled.

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and [I saw] the souls of them that had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, and for the word of God, and [of those] whosoever did not worship the beast, nor his image, and did not receive the mark on their foreheads nor on their hands: and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

These souls are those of the martyrs, whom we have seen under the altar crying unto God that their blood may be avenged (139); also, of all who have not worshipped the beast out of the earth, i. e. who have kept themselves uncorrupted by the world-power in the church; and of all who have not worshipped the image of the beast out of the sea which he causes to be set up (254), i. e. who have not submitted themselves to the temporal power of the apostate church; and of all who did not receive the mark on their foreheads nor on their hands, i. e. who did not yield their faculties of mind or body to subserve her purposes. This fourfold characterization is doubtless intended to include all the true people of God in the spiritual world (114). For they are represented as having departed out of this life, some of them as martyrs; and they are not yet 'clothed upon' with their resurrection bodies (2 Cor. v. 1–4), as it would seem from their being called 'souls'; for this word, though it is often used in the sense of persons, seems to be here a chosen and emphatic word, as in the similar case of the souls of the martyrs under the altar (139). They sit upon thrones, and judgment is given unto them in fulfilment of many prophecies: "Judgment was given unto the saints of the Most

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High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom (Dan. vii. 22). Ye who have followed me in the renewing, *παλιγγενεσία*, when the Son of Man shall sit upon the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mat. xix. 28). He that overcometh, I will give unto him to sit with me in my throne (104). . . . Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? . . . That we shall judge angels?" (1 Cor. vi. 2–3). Just what the function of the saints will be in their judgment of men and angels is not plain, and may never be known till 'the day shall declare it' (iii. 13). The thousand years of their living and reigning with Christ is the period of the millennium, and that during which Satan is bound and shut up in the abyss: but when it shall occur, and what shall be its actual duration, are almost endlessly disputed. For some hold that it is already past, others that it is now passing, and others still that it is yet to come. I agree with these last, for the reason that I cannot find any time past or present which can be fitly represented as one in which Satan is, or has been, chained and imprisoned; although I believe that his power and influence have been much diminished in the progress of Christianity. As to the duration of the millennium, if we compare its symbolical thousand years with 42 months and 1,260 days, the measure of that part of the dispensation which precedes (216), we can hardly fail to understand that it will continue for many thousands of years. But as 10 is the number of definite limitation (59), and 1,000 is the cube of 10, it will certainly come to an end, as we shall see hereafter.

5 The rest of the dead lived not till the thousand years were accomplished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: over these the second death hath no authority; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him for a thousand years.

We have here to deal with one of the most difficult passages in the Apocalypse, and with a great controversy between two schools of interpreters upon the question, What

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are we to understand by the words, 'The rest of the dead lived not till the thousand years were accomplished. This is the first resurrection'? I must give a brief summary of the arguments on both sides.

There are several commentators on this book, whose piety, scholarship, and general ability as interpreters of Scripture, must not be undervalued, and many learned clergymen, who strenuously maintain that this resurrection cannot fairly be understood as anything but a literal one; in other words, that the saints will rise from the dead, and be clothed with their resurrection bodies, at the commencement of the millennium; and that the rest of the dead will not rise until the judgment of the last day. The reasons given for this understanding of the passage are such as the following, and it can hardly be denied that they are of great force: (1) What seems to be the plain and most natural sense of the words, in which a comparison or contrast is implied between two resurrections such that, if one of these be taken literally, so must the other: (2) Wherever the resurrection of the saints is mentioned in Scripture, it is 'from the dead,' i. e. from the rest of the dead; whilst the general resurrection is always spoken of as 'of the dead': (3) Our Lord speaks of 'those who shall be accounted worthy to attain to the resurrection from the dead' (Luke xx. 35), thereby plainly implying that there will be a resurrection to which the unworthy will not attain: St. Paul also speaks of a 'resurrection from the dead' (Phil. iii. 11), to attain unto which he constantly strove, which, therefore, must be a different one from that to which all will attain, whether they strive or not; and he refers to an order in the resurrection according to which 'Christ is the firstfruits, then they that are Christ's, at His coming' (1 Cor. xv. 23); elsewhere also he declares that 'the dead in Christ shall rise first' (1 Thes. iv. 16): (4) The literal understanding of 'the first resurrection' was the prevailing one in the primitive church.

On the other hand, a much greater number of interpreters, and, to say the least, of equal ability, as strenuously maintain that this 'first resurrection' must be figuratively under-

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stood as the raising up and purification of the soul from death in trespasses and sins unto the new life in God; and their reasons are such as the following: (1) It is not certain that the resurrection of the saints is always spoken of as 'from the dead,' for it would seem that the words of St. Paul, 'So also is the resurrection of the dead . . . it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory' (1 Cor. xv. 42), are applicable to no other resurrection but that of the saints: (2) The word resurrection, and the others which express or imply that idea, are often used in a figurative sense, to signify the raising up and purification of the soul from spiritual death, as where it is said, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light (Eph. v. 14). Ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God' (Col. ii. 12): (3) Those who are raised in the first resurrection are spoken of as 'souls,' which seems to imply that they are not yet clothed with their resurrection bodies: (4) In the blessing pronounced upon those who have part in the first resurrection, their blessedness and holiness are made to depend upon their having part in it; but St. Paul informs us that, at the final coming of the Lord, there will be saints still alive, who will not die at all, but 'be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye' (1 Cor. xv. 51), and who consequently will never partake in the blessedness and holiness of this resurrection, if it is to be a literal one: and are those who shall be raised in this first resurrection the only ones over whom 'the second death shall have no authority'? (5) It does not follow from the literalness of the second resurrection that the first must also be a literal one, for there are a first and a second death, one of which is literal, and the other figurative or spiritual; consequently there may be a similar difference between these two resurrections: (6) Such a state of society as that of the resurrected saints in their glorified spiritual bodies, in which 'they neither marry nor are given in marriage' (Mat. xxii. 30), living on earth with men and women in their mortal state, is hardly conceivable, and seems more like the grotesque and bizarre extravagances of Hinduism than the

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sobriety of the Christian religion: (7) It would be strange, indeed, and contrary to the whole analogy of Scripture, that a doctrine of such vast significance as the literal resurrection of the righteous a thousand years before that of the wicked, and their living upon the earth during all this time in association with mortal men, should be revealed nowhere else but in this one passage of the most symbolical book in the Sacred Canon.

I shall not undertake positively to decide between these two views, supported as both are by such strong arguments and such high authorities. Yet I cannot help inclining to the latter, that there will be but one literal or bodily resurrection both of the just and the unjust, which, of course, will include 'the rest of the dead who lived not till the thousand years were accomplished'; that what is meant by the souls of the saints living and reigning with Christ in this vision is, that they are truly alive, and participate in His throne and glory with a fulness greatly enlarged and enhanced by the perfection of His millennial reign. It seems to me that this will be blessedness and glory enough for the white-robed people, and that it is hardly consistent with their coming back to this earth to associate with sinful men and women in the flesh. But I leave this vexed question to be decided by the event. Meanwhile, with this provisional understanding of the first resurrection, we see that the blessing upon those who have part in it comprehends all the true children of God, all who have been 'born of the Spirit,' 'born from above' (John iii. 2–8), all who have been new 'created in righteousness and the holiness of truth' (Eph. iv. 24). Hence the second death, consisting in the punishment of the lake of fire, can have no authority over them, i. e. they cannot be hurt by it; but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, to offer spiritual and ever acceptable sacrifices and service, and they shall reign with Him as partakers of His millennial throne and glory.

In conclusion, we see here that the Lord's millennial reign, though of such immense duration, greater, as it would seem from comparison of its thousand years with other periods

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mentioned in the book, than the whole preceding part of the dispensation, and perhaps than all preceding time of man's history, is here dispatched in two or three sentences, with hardly any particulars. This is very remarkable, especially when we remember what full particulars we have had of the destruction of Babylon, and can hardly be without significance; for naturally we should have expected that the glories of that period would have been portrayed in ample details and glowing colors. Hence we have the conjecture which has been hazarded (198) confirmed; namely, that these glories were the subject of the revelations made by the seven thunders, which the Seer was forbidden to record, perhaps because the church in the wilderness could not bear them. But these long ages of purity, peace, and prosperity in the church, and consequently of her unparalleled efficiency in the salvation of mankind, when the great antichristian world-power, the beast, and the false prophet shall have been overthrown and destroyed, and Satan put in chains and shut up in the abyss, ought to be, as they have ever been to all the pious and godly among men, the object of our prevalent prayers, unwearied labors, and comforting hopes. For although a period of renewed conflict will come after them, it will be very brief. And who can doubt but that multitudes which no man can number will be saved during the millennium, to make it more and more evident to all worlds that 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound' (Rom. v. 20). Indeed, it may well be that they who are finally lost will be in comparison with the saved during this period alone as the small dust of the balance to the treasures that are weighed in it, or as the stalk and husk and chaff to the abundant harvest of precious grain. God grant that it may be so. Amen.

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XLIV

THE POSTMILLENNIAL CONFLICT THE JUDGMENT OF SATAN XX 7–10

This vision also is one of very difficult interpretation. The most that I can hope to do is to gather up the scattered rays of light which gleam from its words and imagery, along with those which are cast upon it from the preceding revelations of this book and other prophetic Scriptures.

7 And when the thousand years are accomplished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, 8 and will come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together unto the war, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

The millennial kingdom of the Lord, as a definitely limited period, will come to an end in the course of time, and the great enemy of God and man, after having been kept in prison and in chains for many ages, will be let loose again, and come forth to deceive the nations, from which will arise the final conflict between good and evil in this world. But why these things should be so is nowhere revealed, and no satisfactory solution of the problem has ever been suggested. It is, as has been said, one of the greatest mysteries of the divine providence (366).

But what nations are these whom Satan will deceive and stir up to rebellion against the Lord and to make war upon His people? Are they such as have never been Christianized, even during the millennium, or Christian nations whom Satan seduces into apostasy? From the words in which they are described, as dwelling 'in the four corners of the earth,' it has been commonly supposed that they are heathen

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peoples having their seats in the extremities of the habitable globe; but it seems better to take the number 'four' in this expression in its common symbolical meaning of universality, as in the case of the four angels who hold the four winds of the earth (152). Hence the expression may be taken as designating the nations of the earth in general, or universally, including Gog and Magog, whom, after they have been Christianized, Satan seduces into apostasy; for there is nothing more incredible or mysterious in such a universal national defection than that he should be loosed out of his prison. Moreover, this interpretation is confirmed by what is said concerning Gog and Magog in the preceding Scriptures. For in the ethnological table Magog is mentioned along with his brethren, the other sons of Japheth, Gomer, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras (Gen. x. 2), who are commonly recognized as the ancestors of the ancient Thracians, Medes, Greeks, Muscovites, Iberians, and others. In Ezekiel, also, in a passage which requires to be studied in this connection, the Persians, Ethiopians, and Libyans are included in the armies of Gog and Magog (Ez. xxxviii., xxxix.). Now these peoples include a large proportion of those that were known in ancient times, and we cannot suppose that all of them will be left out of the Lord's millennial kingdom, especially since many of them have been already at least nominally Christianized. It may, indeed, be gathered from the passages in the prophet just referred to that the names, Gog and Magog, were a general designation of northern heathen nations, but even there they were evidently taken symbolically to designate the enemies of the Lord and His kingdom in the last times. These, as we are here informed, in multitudes like the sand on the sea-shore, Satan will gather together unto 'the war,' i. e. to the final conflict between good and evil in this world which has been previously foreshadowed (320).

9 And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city; and fire came down out of heaven and devoured them.

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The expression 'they went up' seems to refer to the surface of the earth conceived of as an elevated plateau, just as the Arabs in the neighborhood of the great Sahara now speak of going up on the desert. These nations, being as the sand of the sea for multitude, and covering the breadth of the earth, represent the universal character of this national apostasy. 'The beloved city,' which they besiege on all sides, is, of course, Jerusalem, here taken symbolically, as I understand, to represent the church which has remained true and faithful to her allegiance, notwithstanding the general revolt and rebellion: and she is further characterized as 'the camp of the saints,' to signify that they are not taken by surprise, but are found in a state of preparation for war and defence against this desperate and final onslaught. But they have no need to put forth their strength, for this is God's battle, and He will fight for them, as in the historical types to which there are here significant references: "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will work for you to-day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to-day, ye shall see them again no more forever: the Lord will fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace (Ex. xiv. 13–14). Fear not ye, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. . . . Ye shall not need to fight this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord" (2 Chron. xx. 15–17). So in this great antitype, the saints have no need to raise a hand against their enemies; for the fire of God, i. e. the divine justice, of which fire is the constant symbol (166), comes down from heaven and consumes them. The prophecies concerning this great event are very numerous, and they throw some light upon the manner in which this rebellious host is broken up and destroyed: "Son of man, set thy face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus saith the Lord: Behold, I am against thee. O Gog, chief prince of Meshech, and Tubal . . . Persia, Cush, and Put . . . Gomer, and all his hordes . . . Togarmah in the uttermost parts of the north, and all his hordes

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. . . even many peoples with thee. . . . Thou wilt come up, thou wilt come like a storm, thou wilt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou and all thy hordes, and many peoples with thee. . . . Thou wilt come up against my people Israel as a cloud to cover the land: it will come to pass in the latter days. . . . And I will call for a sword against him. . . . Every man's sword shall be against his brother: and I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his hordes, and upon the many peoples that are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone. . . . And I will send a fire upon Magog (Ez. xxxviii.). And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall make fires of the weapons and burn them. . . . They shall make fires of them seven years. . . . And there shall they bury Gog and his multitude: and they shall call it, The Valley of the Multitude of Gog: and seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land" (Ez. xxxix.). The fulness of these prophecies, from which only meagre extracts are given here, represents the great importance of the event; upon which, moreover, the commentators cite the following from the Rabbinical books: "When Gog and Magog shall see the war, Messiah will say unto them, For what have ye come hither? They will answer, Against the Lord, and against His Christ. . . . In the end of days, Gog and Magog will come up against Jerusalem, and shall fall by the hands of King Messiah; and for seven years of days the sons of Israel will make their fires from their weapons."

10 And the devil, the deceiver of them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone; where also the beast and the false prophet are; and they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Such is the end of Satan's career, as also it was preordained from the time that he fell from heaven (237), and set himself to work woe to mankind. Now he is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death, i. e. he is subjected to the utmost punitive energy of the divine justice; whither have already preceded him his two

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great instruments of evil, the antichristian political and ecclesiastical powers, i. e. those who have upheld and exercised these powers, and perhaps the fallen angels by whom they have been animated and inspired (246). From this doleful prison they shall never more escape, but shall be incessantly tormented therein forever and ever. For moral evil originated, as we have seen, in the purely spiritual nature of Satan and his angels, who were not liable to temptation, as was man, through union of that nature with a material element (238); and they seem to have identified themselves wholly with evil. Hence it became inseparable from them. For them no atonement could be made, and no salvation was possible. But in man sin was not self-originated, but came in from a foreign source, through his lower nature, his flesh, with which his spiritual nature was united in one personality, under the temptation of Satan.* Hence it is essentially separable from the nature of man; for him salvation is possible, and can be perfected when 'the body of this death' (Rom. vii. 24) shall drop off, and he shall be clothed upon with his spiritual body at the resurrection of the just (296). Hence also it is not until the souls and bodies of Satan's followers are separated, and their spiritual nature, their inmost essence, is found to be utterly corrupted, and wholly identified with evil, that they are made partakers with him of eternal torment. Hence again the necessity for the judgment after death, which the next vision brings into view.

The final extinction of the evil that is in the world was foreseen from the mountain-tops of prophecy from the time when it originated. In was in the promise that 'the Seed of the woman should crush the head of the serpent' (Gen. iii. 15), and it grows clearer and more certain in all the subsequent prophecies. The Hebrew seers never waver or falter. Their trumpets give no uncertain sound. Even in the darkest hours, when decay and corruption are almost universal, when the feeble germs of truth and life seem about to perish,

* For the nature of man's first sin, see *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, iv.

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they continue to cry aloud, and spare not: The evil shall go down; the good shall be established; there is a good time coming, when truth and justice shall prevail; when 'the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea' (Is. xi. 9). And by this hope we are saved; for despair of the final destiny of man is death to every pure and noble aspiration and to all spiritual energy, and contains in itself a germ of the worm that never dies and of the fire that is never quenched.

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XLV

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD AND THE JUDGMENT AFTER DEATH XX 11–14

This vision involves many questions of deep interest and great difficulty, such as the following: What is the resurrection? What is the significance of the judgment after death? Who are they that are judged? How are the saints judged according to their works? What is meant by the opening of the books, and by Death and Hades being cast into the lake of fire? It may not be possible for us to obtain wholly satisfactory answers to all such questions as these, yet it would be strange if we should be left altogether in the dark upon matters of such grave importance.

11 And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and for them no place was found.

This throne is 'great' in contrast with the inferior thrones of the four and twenty elders (111), and with those upon which the saints have reigned during the millennium (367), but more especially as significant of the greatness of Him who sits upon it. It is 'white' to represent the immaculate purity and the victorious efficacy of the judgment to be dispensed from it (35). He who sits upon it is God in His substantial and eternal unity. For the idea of the Father cannot be excluded, because in this book He is constantly designated as 'He who sits upon the throne' (109); neither can the Holy Spirit, because it is His work to 'convict the world in respect of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment' (John xvi. 8). Yet the mental image which we are to form of the Judge is that of the Son, in whom 'dwelleth all the

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fulness of the Godhead bodily' (Col. ii. 9); "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son (John v. 22). He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts xvii. 31). 'The earth and the heaven' may be taken here both in their literal and symbolical import, and their fleeing away from before the face of the Judge, so that no place is found for them, represents the awful glory of His countenance as being such that nothing in the old corrupt world can stand before it; as such that in view of it the physical universe is now preternaturally convulsed, as described at the opening of the sixth seal (146), and perhaps literally consumed with fire, as at the destruction of Babylon (345); as such that before it the natural life of man, with all its mediate sources of light (252), now passes away forever, either by death, or by that instantaneous change of which St. Paul speaks in the words: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (1 Cor. xv. 51).

12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is [the book] of life; and the dead were judged out of the things written in the books according to their works.

These words evidently declare that all mankind, having passed out of this life, do now appear before the great white throne and are judged according to their works. Those commentators who take the first resurrection literally, i. e. who understand that the saints are raised from the dead at the commencement of the millennium (369), are compelled to exclude them from this resurrection and consequently from this judgment; and they give no account that I can find of what is to be done with those saints who are born, live, and die during the millennium. But the words here suggest no such limitation, and it is palpably inconsistent with a multitude of other Scriptures, which declare that all

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men, saints and sinners, shall stand before this throne, and be judged according to their works: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things [done] in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. v. 10). This judgment and these books are spoken of also by the prophet Daniel as follows: "The Ancient of Days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: a fiery stream issued and came forth before Him . . . and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened" (Dan. vii. 9–10). These books are evidently the symbol of God's perfect and imperishable knowledge of all human actions and characters (86), whether manifested externally through the bodily organs, or hidden away in the secrecy of the heart: "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified . . . in the day when God will judge the secrets of men . . . by Jesus Christ (Rom. ii. 12–16), who will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart" (1 Cor. iv. 5). The words, 'according to their works,' express the general principle upon which this judgment will be given, namely, that of justice, for God is immutably just: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? (Gen. xviii. 25). Justice and judgment are the establishment of His throne" (Ps. xcvii. 2). He is under no conceivable temptation to do wrong to any of His creatures, and He is not liable to error in His knowledge of actions or characters, or of the secrets of the human heart. All the aggravations, and all the palliations as well, of men's sins of thought, feeling, and act, will be fully considered, and allowed their due weight in determining the sentences of that day.

A more special form of this general principle, however, is, that men will be held responsible according to their light: "The servant that knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to His will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes: and to

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whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required" (Luke xii. 47–48). (1) This principle will condemn the heathen who have not lived up to their light: "Because that which may be known of God is manifest among them, for God hath showed it unto them; for the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. i. 19–20): not, indeed, as having sinned against the revealed will of God, but against 'the law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness therewith, and their thoughts one with another accusing or else excusing them' (Rom. ii. 9–15). (2) With a still more crushing weight will this principle condemn the unbelieving Jews; for it will bring 'wrath and indignation, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Greek. . . . For . . . as many as have sinned under law shall be judged by law.' Against them will come the testimony of the covenants and promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that of all the signs and wonders wrought for their deliverance from the bondage in Egypt; that of the law from Mount Sinai, of the pillar of cloud and fire, of the water from the rock of Horeb, and of the brazen serpent in the wilderness; that of Moses and Elijah, Isaiah, Daniel, and all the prophets, that of John the Baptist, and of Him who was the greatest of them all, Jesus Christ the righteous, whom they slew and hanged upon a tree. When all this testimony shall be read from 'the opened books' before the great white throne, the guilt of their unbelief must be made to appear as enormous, and crushing must be their final doom. (3) This principle must also be applied to those who have enjoyed the superior light of the new dispensation, even to the saints themselves. But here a question arises, How can they be judged according to their light and their works, when 'there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus' (Rom. viii. 1), all whose sins are forgiven, and shall be remembered against them no more forever? (Heb. viii. 12). This question requires us to take into account the most fundamental truth

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of the gospel, namely, that God has provided a 'new and living way' (x. 20) for the exercise of His mercy upon believing souls without detriment to His justice, holiness, or other attributes. This new way consists in the mediation and sacrifice of Christ, whereby a principle of commutation is introduced into the administration of divine justice, as declared in the words: "Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation by His blood through faith to declare His justice for the remission of sins . . . for the declaration of His justice . . . that He might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus" (Rom. iii. 24–26). By this substitution all the demands of God's justice against believers are commutatively met and discharged. Hence it is not by the suspension, setting aside, or sacrifice of justice that mercy is exercised upon believers, for it has no penal claims upon them because Christ has met these claims, and they have availed themselves of this commutation by faith in Him: on the contrary, it is in perfect consistency with justice, as revealed in the mediation of Christ, that believers shall stand openly acquitted and justified before the throne, and the Judge Himself will say to them: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Mat. xxv. 34). Now this commutative principle of the divine justice centres in, and emanates from, Christ; and by means of it He becomes to believers 'the Sun of righteousness with healing in His wings' (Mal. iv. 2). Hence the one all-comprehending demand of God's justice upon men under the superior light of the new dispensation is, that they believe in Christ, as in His own words: "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent" (John vi. 29): and they who do this meet the responsibility which this light of Christ lays upon them; they do that 'work of God' which determines the view which He will take of all their other works, and the judgment which He will pronounce upon them in the last day. On the other hand, they who do not accept this commutative principle in the divine justice by believing in

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Christ do not act according to the superior light of the new dispensation, nor meet the increased responsibility which it lays upon them. Hence they do not avail themselves of its benefits, but continue to stand under the penal claims of God's justice for all their sins; they must be judged according to their personal deserts in all their works; because they reject the only way in which, as God views the matter, mercy can be shown, judgment without mercy must be their portion; and their punishment must needs be the most rigorous of all, as in the following declarations: "This is the judgment, that light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil (John iii. 19). If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin (xv. 22). If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fierceness of the fire which shall devour the adversaries. A man that hath despised Moses' law dieth without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me; I will recompense: and, again, The Lord will judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. x. 26–31).

13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged, each one, according to their works.

These words place before us a very vivid picture of the resurrection of the dead, and of the judgment after death. Three classes are mentioned evidently as inclusive of all human souls, i. e. those in the sea, those in Death, taken here, not in its special sense of pestilence (132), but in its general import. But these classes cannot be understood

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as exclusive of each other, for both the dead in the sea and those in Hades are certainly also in Death. The first class may contain an allusion in refutation of the popular heathen error, that those who perished by shipwreck, and were thus deprived of burial rites, did not descend into Hades, but wandered forever about the world of waters. It would seem that these several classes are mentioned only for the sake of emphasis upon the truth, that all the dead, howsoever they may have perished, wherever they may be, whatever may be their condition, are the subjects of this resurrection, do now appear alive before the judgment throne, and are judged individually, 'each one,' according to their works. They may have been submerged in the depths of the sea; they may have become the prey of Death in any other form; they may have vanished as shades into the unseen world; but here they all are now, living persons, in all the reality of life, before the great white throne.

But here we have to grapple with some of the most perplexing problems in the whole vast realm of theology. For what, we must now inquire, is the Scriptural doctrine of the resurrection of the dead? What is it that takes place? and what is its significance? The following observations may throw some light on this obscure but most interesting subject. (1) It is not the gross material body with which we are now clothed, but a spiritual one, that will be raised. (*a*) For the resurrection of our material bodies involves a palpable absurdity, inasmuch as they are resolved into their original elements taken from the earth and atmosphere, which re-enter into the composition of other bodies, and thus constitute the materials of many such bodies in succession: (*b*) St. Paul explicitly informs us that the resurrection body is not the same in all particulars with the one that perishes; that it is not material but spiritual: "So also is the resurrection of the dead. . . . It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Cor. xv. 44). (2) In the same connection He teaches us that there is a vital relation between these two bodies which is analogous to that between the old

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seed planted in the ground and the new grain which springs from it: "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die; and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed its own body" (xv. 36–38). Thus we are taught that the material body is, in some sort, the germ of the spiritual body, from which it springs, or is raised up, and without which it could never have existed. (3) It is doubted by some, whether the resurrection takes place immediately at death, or not until the day of judgment; and there seems to be room for difference of opinion on this question. For, on the one side, it seems strange that the spiritual body should be, in any sense, subject to death, and no less strange that the souls of the saints should be left for so many thousands of years in that imperfect state in which they are not yet 'clothed upon with their house not made with hands' (2 Cor. v. 1), but, in a certain sense, naked: and our Lord speaks of the resurrection as actually present in His time, as well as yet in the future: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live" (John v. 25). On the other side, the souls of the martyrs and saints are spoken of as if they were still without their resurrection bodies (1139); and St. Paul refers to Hymenæus and Philetus as to heretics 'who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is passed already, and overthrow the faith of some' (2 Tim. ii. 18). On the whole, without attempting positively to decide this question, but leaving it to be determined by the event, it may be safest for us to hold, with the great body of the church in all ages, that the resurrection of all men will be simultaneous at the time of the general judgment. (4) It is curious to observe that, in most cases where the resurrection is mentioned or referred to, it signifies nothing more than immortality, or a life after death. Thus where the Lord confutes the Sadducees: "As touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by

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God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. xxii. 31–32). Self-evidently what He means by the resurrection here is not a future event, but something which can be predicated of the patriarchs in their present condition, namely, that they are not dead, but are living persons. In like manner, St. Paul: "If the dead are not raised . . . they also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Cor. xv. 16–19). This reasoning, both of the Lord and His apostle, absolutely requires that it should mean no more by the resurrection than that there is a future life; for otherwise the objectors might have refuted it by replying, We do not deny that the souls of the dead are still alive (though the Sadducees denied even that), but only that their bodies are raised: what nonsense, then, do you talk saying that, apart from the resurrection of the body, you can have no hope in Christ, and are of all men most miserable, when you have still before you the immortality of your souls, and eternal life from Him! Hence it seems plain that the deepest significance of the doctrine of the resurrection is that it gives certainty to that of immortality, or at least to that of a future life. (5) Moreover, a true faith in the resurrection of the body imparts a reality to that life, or to our conceptions of it, which were otherwise impossible. For it enables us to conceive of it as a life in the body, as a form of that organic life which is the only kind with which we are acquainted by experience; and this, in opposition to the heathen error, that the souls of the dead were nothing but 'shades,' their life, if such it could be called, shadowy and unreal, and the enjoyments of the virtuous altogether unsatisfactory, in comparison with those of their former life in the body. Thus Homer makes the shade of Achilles in the Elysian Fields say to Ulysses, who was permitted to visit him: "I would rather be a serf attached to the soil, a servant to another portionless man, to whom there should be small means to support life, than to be king

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over all the perished dead."* In contrast with all this, the doctrine of the resurrection of the body assures us that after death our souls will possess bodily organisms of an incorruptible imperishable material; that we shall be as visible and palpable to each other as we are now; that we shall hear with our ears, and speak with our mouths, and grasp each other's hands in social intercourse, as we do now; in a word, that our life will be real and substantial.

14 And Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire: this is the second death, the lake of fire: 15 and if any one was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Here, as elsewhere, Death and Hades are personified, perhaps with reference to fallen angels, demon powers, presiding over these dark realms (39), but certainly as representing all human beings who remain under the power of spiritual death, or moral evil. The idea expressed by their being cast into the lake of fire, is either that of their utter destruction, or that of their being subjected to the utmost punitive energy of the divine justice (376). Thus they who are not 'found written in the book of life' (86), i. e. all who are not known to the Lord as His own, the incorrigibly wicked, reap the final reward of their wickedness, in fulfilment of the words of the Lord: "Then will He say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, which is prepared for the devil and his angels. . . . And these shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Mat. xxv. 41–46). Thus, also, as in the parables of the sheep and the goats, and of the wheat and the tares (xiii. 30), they are separated forever from the saved, and put where they can do no more harm, where the good shall be no more vexed nor contaminated by association with them; and 'then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father' (xiii. 43). The lake of fire is also another name for

* Βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλῳ
ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρῳ ᾧ μὴ βίοτος πολὺς εἴη
ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.
Od. xi. 489.

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'the second death,' i. e. not the bare negation of life, but its opposite, death in trespasses and sins with all its consequences. On the other hand, they whom this death shall not hurt (60), for them there shall be no more death, but an everlasting experience of what is signified by such declarations as the following: "Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might deliver all them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage (Heb. ii. 14–15). The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. . . . When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:

> Death is swallowed up in victory:
> O Death, where is thy victory?
> O Hades, where is thy sting?" (1 Cor. xv. 26, 54–55.)

This vision closes the sixth series of the revelations of this book, which is to be followed by the seventh and last. Such, also, will be the end of the dispensation in which we are now living, and of the present world, in preparation for 'the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness' (2 Pet. iii. 13). The evil that is in the world, which originated in the sin of the first man, will be abolished by this final judgment, which has been often foreshadowed in these visions, and in which all wrongs will be righted; the righteous being openly acquitted and justified, the blood of the martyrs amply avenged, and all who have given themselves to work iniquity punished according to their deserts. And by this judgment the final destiny of every human soul will be determined. Before this great white throne we all must appear, and abide by the decision which He from whose face the heaven and the earth shall flee away shall give concerning us. What, then, have we to do but to live so that we may be accepted of Him in that day, and not so as to bring upon ourselves 'shame and everlasting contempt'? (Dan. xii. 2). What folly can equal that of so living as to 'treasure up unto ourselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God'? (Rom. ii. 5).

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XLVI

THE NEW HEAVEN AND NEW EARTH RESTORATION OF ALL THINGS XXI 1–8

We have here the commencement of the seventh and last series of these revelations, and of a new dispensation of the mystery of the divine providence. The world of evil has now come to an end, and the world of good, wherein all things are made new, takes its place. The natural is now superseded by the spiritual. Here all the promises are fulfilled, all the hopes they have awakened realized. This opening vision of the series evidently comprehends in a summary manner all that is to follow concerning the New Jerusalem, ample particulars of which will be given in their place. Yet it will be extremely difficult for us, surrounded and influenced, as we are, by the old world, to comprehend and realize this new order of things, which is so remote in the future, and so different from all that we have ever experienced. This, however, must not deter us, having now, by our study of the preceding revelations, passed through our prescribed preparation for it, from an earnest effort to grasp as much of it as we can, remembering how 'blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear, the words of the prophecy' of this book (10).

1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away, and the sea is no more.

We have seen that the earth and the heaven fled away from the face of Him who sat upon the great white throne, and for them no place was found. This may signify that they were literally consumed by fire; but even if so, the symbolical meaning of their passing away must not be left out

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of view, which, as we have seen (380), is, that the whole natural life of man, with all its mediate sources of light, has forever disappeared; and hence, as we shall see in the sequel, the saved have no more need of the sun in this symbolical sense (147). Perhaps also the sea may be taken here both in its literal and symbolical meanings; in the former of which, its being no more refers to its evaporation by the fire that consumes the earth; in the latter, to the end of national life as subject to strifes and sinful perturbations, of which the sea is the constant symbol (244); but beyond a question this last is the principal idea intended. In like manner, the new heaven and new earth which now come into view represent the physical world as completely renovated, and the renovation of the life and light of its inhabitants, who are now raised from the dead, clothed with their spiritual and immortal bodies, no longer subject to sin, or death, nor any of its consequences: for their new life necessarily requires that its habitat and environment should be adapted to it. Such is the complete palingenesia which will take place in fulfilment of a multitude of prophecies, of which the following are examples: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind (Is. lxv. 17). According to His promise, we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness (2 Pet. iii. 13). The times of restoration of all things, whereof God hath spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets which have been since the world began (Acts iii. 21). The earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. . . . The creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the liberty of the glory of the children of God" (Rom viii. 19–21).

2 And I saw the Holy City, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The New Jerusalem is the symbol of the church of the resurrection in her triumphant glories. Hitherto she has been 'the Jerusalem that is above . . . which is our mother'

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(Gal iv. 26); but now she descends out of heaven from God, thus signifying, (1) that the final and perfect state of humanity is not evolved out of the political, nor any other form of man's natural life, but is altogether of heavenly origin, the work of God making all things new; (2) that the saints who have been received up into heaven, there to await the restoration of all things, do now return to the earth, which has been renovated and prepared for their everlasting abode; or that the heavenly mansions themselves, with all their inhabitants, now descend and are established upon the earth; or that whatever has hitherto separated earth from heaven is removed; that the two are now united and become one, which last idea is still further represented and emphasized in the marriage of the Lamb with His human Bride. For in order to the fulness and perfection of His triumph, it is necessary that even the place where the evil has been wrought should become the place where the good shall forever reign. And now the church of the resurrection, emancipated from bondage to the world, even from the influences of the flesh, clothed with her spiritual body, and with the righteousnesses which are the gift of her Lord, is prepared for the consummation of her marriage with her celestial Bridegroom (350), as a bride adorned for her husband. For she has arrayed herself in 'the fine linen bright and pure,' and beautified herself, not with 'outward adorning of plaiting of the hair, of jewels and gold, nor of outward apparel, but with that of the hidden man of the heart, incorruptible, a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price' (1 Pet. iii. 3–4). The following are some of the glowing symbols in which this great spiritual transaction is represented by the prophets:

> The King's daughter within is all glorious;
> Her clothing is inwrought with gold.
> She shall be led unto the King in broidered work:
> The virgins, her companions that follow her,
> Shall be brought unto thee:
> With gladness and rejoicing shall they be led;
> They shall enter into the King's palace (Ps. xlv. 13–15).
> He hath clothed me with the garments of salvation,

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He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness;
As a bridegroom decketh himself with a garland,
And as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels (Is. lxi. 10).
Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken;
Neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate:
But thou shalt be called My-delight-is-in-her,
And thy land Married:
For the Lord delighteth in thee,
And thy land shall be married . . .
For as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride,
So will thy God rejoice over thee (Is. lxii. 4-5).

3 And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His peoples, and He will be God with them, their God; 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more; for the first things are passed away.

This great voice out of the throne represents the authority and power of God (348). In what follows there are evident allusions to three things: (1) To the tabernacle in the wilderness, wherein the abiding presence of God with His people was represented by the shekinah above the mercy-seat in the Holy of Holies; (2) To the name of the Holy City at the close of the prophecies of Ezekiel, Jehovah-Shammah, the Lord-is-there (Ez. xlviii. 25); (3) To the name of Christ, Immanuel, God-with-us: as also to many such declarations as the following: "I will dwell among the sons of Israel, and will be their God (Ex. xxix. 45). I will set my tabernacle among you. . . . I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people" (Lev. xxvi. 11-12): for it is here at last that these prophecies attain to their crowning fulfilment. The word 'peoples' is in the plural apparently to denote the vast extension which these promises to Israel have now received, in that the gentiles who were formerly alienated are reconciled, and have come to inherit them. Now, moreover, the happiness of mankind is absolutely perfect; for death, with all that it implies of sin and misery, is done away, he that had the power of it having been cast into the lake of fire; and God Himself, with His

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own tender hand, wipes away every tear from the eyes of His children, as a mother comforts her babe (160).

5 And He that sitteth upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He saith, Write, for these words are faithful and true. 6 And He said unto me, They are fulfilled. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

The voice out of the throne is immediately followed by that of Him who sits upon the throne (109), saying, 'Behold, I make all things new,' evidently referring to the new heaven and new earth and to the New Jerusalem. It has been thought by some that this command, 'Write,' is given by the angel who has been the medium in previous communications, and who will appear hereafter; but it seems better to understand that it is God Himself who continues to speak, and who here enjoins upon the Seer to record for all time the words he has just heard and those that are to follow, because they are faithful and true, and as in the vision have now come to their fulfilment. The formula, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega' (22) is here introduced again, signifying that God is the eternal One, who was before all things, and is the end to which they all return; in whom all the aspirations and hopes of humanity find their accomplishment and fruition, all man's spiritual longings complete satisfaction.

6 I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. 7 He that overcometh shall inherit these things, and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

Hunger and thirst are the natural and most common Scriptural symbols of sensibility to spiritual need, the feeling of spiritual want, as in our Lord's words: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled" (Mat. v. 6). The fountain or original source of the water of life is in the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. xxii. 1), i. e. in the will and government of God, and in the mediatorial government and sacrifice of Christ; and it is by this only that the craving of man's spiritual nature can be satisfied. Similar imagery abounds in the Scriptures:

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"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters;
And he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat;
Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price (Is. lv. 1).

. . . Whosoever drinketh of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into eternal life" (John iv. 14). This living water God gives 'freely' unto every thirsting soul, because we have nothing to pay for it, and because it is above all price. But it is only they who overcome in their conflicts with the evil that is in the world (86), as this is pictured in the preceding visions, especially in the Epistles to the churches, to which there is here a pointed and significant reference, who shall 'inherit,' or come into possession of, 'these things,' i. e. who shall attain to the fulfilment of all the promises, including this one, that God will be their God, and they shall be His sons.

8 But the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and fornicators and sorcerers and idolaters and all the liars, their part is in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

This catalogue is substantially the same with that of those who are excluded from the New Jerusalem (Rev. xxii. 15). It begins with 'the cowardly,' in contrast with the preceding conquerors, the tried and victorious soldiers of the cross, who have bravely 'fought the good fight of faith and thus laid hold on eternal life' (1 Tim. vi. 12); because they who have no heart for this warfare against the evil are in league with it, and as certain to perish as the others with whom they are here enumerated: "He that is not with me is against me (Mat. xii. 30):

Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the Lord,
Curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof;
Because they came not up to the help of the Lord,
To the help of the Lord, among the mighty" (Judges v. 23).

Moreover, a slavish fear, at least despair of the mercy of God, is no less fatal to the soul than crime itself. The second is the 'unbelieving,' because salvation is by faith alone:

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"This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent (John vi. 29). He that believeth not God hath made Him a liar (1 John v. 10). Without faith it is impossible to please Him. . . . This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (v. 4). The 'abominable' are those who are guilty of sins against nature (Rom. i. 24–27). 'Murderers and fornicators' are everywhere represented as under the wrath of God. 'Sorcerers' are those who identify themselves with the spiritual powers of evil for the gratification of selfish and malignant passions (194). 'Idolaters' include all who worship idols or false gods, along with the covetous, for 'covetousness is idolatry' (Col. iii. 5). The list closes with 'all the liars' in reference, (1) to those who reject the Lord, for 'who is a liar but he who denieth that Jesus is the Christ?' (1 John ii. 22): (2) to those who for their incorrigible sins are judicially blinded to believe soul-destroying lies, and who thus have fallen into the power of the false prophet, to whom 'God sends strong delusion, that they should believe a lie, that they all may be judged as not believing the truth' (2 Thes. ii. 7–12): (3) to all who practice deception for selfish or malignant purposes. These all 'have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death' (389).

Thus closes this summary view of what will follow the judgment of the great day, the particulars of which will be given hereafter in the symbols of the New Jerusalem. There are those, however, who interpret these symbols as representing a perfected state of humanity in the flesh, but I cannot agree with them. To me it seems plain that the Golden City which comes down out of heaven, in which all things are made new, is the symbol of the church of the resurrection; and I cannot find any good reason for believing that any will be admitted into it but those who have passed through death, and are clothed with their resurrection bodies.

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XLVII

THE NEW JERUSALEM THE CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION XXI 9–27 XXII 1–5

The picture here given us of the Golden City is one of surpassing sublimity and beauty. If it had been merely the work of a human artist, it could never be sufficiently admired or praised. The vividness of the word-painting is such that we seem to see everything with our bodily eyes; and everything is significant of some glorious and precious truth pertaining to the life of the saved after they have been raised from the dead; whilst that life is represented as no less real than this which we now live in the flesh. Indeed, it would seem that the principal object and most important use of the whole symbol are, to give reality to our conceptions of the beatitudes and glories of our future life, in which all our spiritual longings and hopes are to attain their everlasting and all-satisfying fruition.

9 And there came one of the seven angels that had the seven chalices full of the seven last plagues, and spake with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.

It was one of these angels who showed to the Seer Babylon, the harlot city, the great antichristian world-power, overthrown and destroyed by the divine judgments (325); and here, in like manner, it is one of them who shows him the faithful city, New Jerusalem, the Bride who has now become the wife of the Lamb (350), the church of the saved in the perfection of her purity, beauty, and glory. A significant contrast between these two grand series of images, and between the truths which they signify, runs through all the particulars of both. The ministry of these angels of the

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last plagues in them both symbolizes what we have seen in almost all these visions (169), namely, that the judgments of God are closely connected with, and are, indeed, the necessary means unto, the blessed and glorious result of the whole providential scheme. It is to be observed also that, as in the Babylon series there is a blending of the two images of a city and a harlot (336), so in this New Jerusalem series there is a similar blending of two, those of a city and of a chaste bride.

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit unto a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.

The Seer had been carried away in the Spirit by one of these angels 'into a wilderness' (326), where he saw the harlot, in all her meretricious adornment, riding upon the scarlet beast, representing the church corrupted by the world, and holding the secular powers in subjection; and now he is carried away in the same state of spiritual ecstasy (26) 'unto a mountain great and high,' where he is shown the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, representing the church of the saved, purified from all worldly contaminations, and blazing with all her spiritual glories. In like manner, when the Lord would show to the prophet Ezekiel in apocalyptic vision the same glorified city, He set him 'upon a very high mountain' (Ez. xl. 2); and when He would unveil to His three chosen disciples His transfiguration glories, 'He led them up into a high mountain apart' (Mat. xvii. 1). So, also, the glory of the Lord appeared on the top of mount Sinai at the giving of the law (Ex. xxiv. 16), and unto Abraham on mount Moriah at the sacrifice of Isaac; in connection with which last an old Hebrew proverb is cited: "In the mount of the Lord He will appear" (Gen. xxii. 14). Perhaps the connection between these epiphanies and the tops of mountains may be understood from the fact, that the physical effects experienced at such great elevations above the earth, where the air is pure, and the view immensely extended, are wonderfully symbolical

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and expressive of spiritual exaltation and the raptures of beatific vision (27). There are Beulah heights and transfiguration mountains in the experience of God's people, from which they obtain heart-ravishing views of the Lord's glory and of the celestial city (392). Here it is repeated that the city is seen 'coming down out of heaven from God' for the sake of emphasis upon the significance of that grand symbol: and the words, 'having the glory of God,' are added to denote two things: (1) that the church of the resurrection possesses the fulness of the divine presence and glory, which was foreshadowed by the shekinah in the Holy of Holies; (2) that she herself is the perfect manifestation of this glory: both of which ideas will be copiously developed in the sequel.

11 The light thereof was like unto a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal: 12 having a wall great and high; having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names written thereon, which are [the names] of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel: 13 on the east three gates, and on the north three gates, and on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and upon them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The light of the city, which is the glory of God, is as clear as crystal, like that of the jasper stone, which is here represented as the most precious of all jewels, and consequently is understood to be the diamond, which otherwise is not mentioned at all in these visions, an omission which would be inexplicable. We have seen also that 'He who sat upon the throne was to the sight like a jasper stone' (109), which identifies the light of the city with the glory of God. The symbolical meaning of the 'wall great and high' is given by the prophet as follows:

> Salvation will He appoint for walls and bulwarks . . .
> Thou shalt call thy walls salvation and thy gates praise (Is. xxvi. 1; lx. 18).

Thus we see that this wall of the city is the symbol of salvation, as the walls of cities in general are for the safety of their inhabitants; and this is the reason why it is so 'great

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and high,' namely, that it may fitly represent the greatness and height of the final salvation. In the wall there are twelve gates, with reference to the twelve tribes of Israel, whose names are inscribed upon them. In the corresponding vision of Ezekiel, the gates of the several tribes are specified, i. e. Reuben, Judah, and Levi, on the north; Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan, on the east; Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulon, on the south; Gad, Asher, and Naphtali, on the west (Ez. xlviii. 31–34). But we have seen in the vision of the sealing of the servants of God out of the tribes, that Dan is omitted altogether (156); and this significant variation seems plainly to indicate that these names are not to be taken literally in the sense of Israel according to the flesh, but as symbols in accordance with the symbolical character of the whole book. These gates include three grand ideas: (1) They represent the means or way through which the nations have been received into the church, or state of salvation, as in the prophecy:

> Thy gates also shall be open continually;
> They shall not be shut day nor night:
> That they may bring unto thee the forces of the nations,
> And their kings led [with them].
> For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish;
> Yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted (Is. lx. 11–12).

(2) The names of the tribes on the gates signify that it is through the instrumentality of the church that the nations have been received into the state of salvation, as in all times it is through the agency of God's people that the gospel and the Christian religion are communicated to mankind: (3) The gates are a part of the wall, in connection with which one element of their symbolical meaning is interpreted as follows:

> Thou shalt call thy walls salvation, and thy gates praise (Is. lx. 18).
> That I may show forth thy praise,
> In the gates of the daughter of Zion,
> I will rejoice in thy salvation (Ps. ix. 14).
> Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
> And into His courts with praise (c. 4).

Hence these gates, being twelve in number, and a part of the walls which they adorn and beautify, symbolize the crown-

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ing completeness (109) of the great salvation, and the beauty of the praise which goes forth from it. The twelve angels, one at each gate, represent the fulness and completeness of the angelic ministry to the saved, as in the words: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation? (Heb. i. 14).

> The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him,
> And delivereth them" (Ps. xxxiv. 7).

There may be, also, in this station of the angels at the gates an allusion to their ministry in offering to God the prayers and praises of the saints (123). In fine, the city has twelve foundation stones, upon which are engraved the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, as those of the tribes are upon the gates, to signify that the church, in all completeness, is founded upon the apostles, i. e. upon their teaching, character, and labors in the cause of the Lamb, by whose sacrifice for and in them they have come to this honor and glory: in all which there are plain allusions to the following: "I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter [a rock], and upon this rock will I build my church (Mat. xvi. 18). Ye are fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner stone" (Eph. ii. 19–20)

15 And he that spake with me had for a measure a golden reed, that he might measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. 16 And the city lieth four-square, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth. And he measured the city with the reed unto twelve thousand furlongs: the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal. 17 And he measured the wall thereof, a hundred and forty and four cubits, the measure of a man, that is, of an angel.

The significance of this measuring of the city is the same with that of the measuring of the temple in a former vision (211), i. e. God's perfect knowledge of His people, both collectively and individually, as His own peculiar possession, whereby their salvation has been infallibly secured. Its being measured with a 'golden reed' signifies the excellence

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and perfection of His knowledge of them. Thus also the city is shown to be a perfect square, with its sides to the four cardinal points; and as four is the symbol of the world, or totality, this is to be understood as signifying that it now includes the whole world (114) as renovated and purified, i. e. all of the saved. Moreover, as the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, the inmost shrine or dwelling place of God, was a geometrical square, this form of the city signifies that it is all one Holy of Holies for the indwelling of God and the manifestation of His glory. But not only is it a square, it is also a cube, for its length and breadth and height are equal; and its measurement, probably that of these three dimensions added together, extends to 12,000 furlongs, 1,500 miles, wherein the number 12 is repeated 1,000 times; which may be intended to symbolize the absolute and transcendent completeness of the church of the resurrection. The enormous height of the city, 500 miles, is abundant evidence, one would think, that it cannot be a real city, but that it is to be understood as a symbolical representation. In the thickness of the wall, which is 144 times the length of a man's arm from the elbow to the tips of the fingers, or of an angel's, referring to the angel who measures it, we have the square of 12, which seems to denote the thorough completeness, and, as it were, the solidity of the salvation which the wall symbolizes.

18 And the building of the wall thereof was of jasper; and the city was pure gold, like unto pure glass. 19 The foundation stones of the wall of the city were adorned with every precious stone: the first foundation stone was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, 20 the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprasus, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.

These first words cannot mean that the whole wall was of jasper, for eleven of its twelve foundation stones were other gems. The word ἐνδόμησις here rendered 'building,' in deference to high authority, is of rare occurrence and obscure meaning. Etymologically it should signify inbuilding, or a thing built into something else; and, so rendered here,

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it enables us to understand the statement in the sense that 'jasper was built into the wall,' alluding to the jasper of the first foundation stone. It must be acknowledged, however, that this is rather a frigid meaning. As the covering of the ark of the testimony, upon which the glory of God rested, was of pure gold (Ex. xxxvii. 6), so here the whole city, including apparently its walls, is of gold so pure that it is like transparent glass, to denote the utmost purity and preciousness of all that it symbolizes (33), and that it is permeated and illuminated throughout by the presence and glory of God. It has not been found possible to identify with certainty all these gems. They are the same in number, and in most of their names, with those on the breastplate of the Jewish high-priest (110), but they are enumerated in a different order, and apparently with principal reference to their colors. Here, therefore, I can only give what seems most probable: (1) The jasper or diamond (109), white, pure and essential light; (2) sapphire, sky-blue; (3) chalcedony or agate, semi-opaque, 'varied with the colors of autumn leaves'; (4) emerald, leaf-green; (5) sardonyx, soft red, 'like the finger nails'; (6) sardius, flesh-colored; (7) chrysolite, yellow, 'shining with a golden splendor'; (8) beryl, sea green; (9) topaz, pale green, 'with shifting colors'; (10) chrysoprasus, dark blue shaded with gold; (11) jacinth, violet; (12) amethyst, purple. There is no doubt but that all the colors of these precious stones were intended to symbolize a profound meaning, but, as they are not quite certain, it cannot be certainly determined. With safety, however, it can be said, that the white light of the diamond symbolizes purity and victory; the sky-blue of the sapphire, heavenly stability; the soft red of the sardonyx, the tenderness of holy affections; the yellow of the chrysolite, intense and radiant life; and the purple of the amethyst, royal authority and power. The jewels are twelve in number, to signify the completeness and preciousness of that which they represent; and, as we have seen that two of them symbolize qualities, traits, or attributes of God (110), it is to be inferred that this is true of all the others. Hence, as foundation stones of the city,

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they signify that it is primarily founded upon God in all His precious and glorious attributes; and, as inscribed with the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, upon these same traits of character reproduced in them, in their teaching and labors, through the efficacy of His most holy sacrifice.

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

In one of the prophets, these gates are carbuncles (Is. liv. 12), but here the imagery is varied, which is another reminder that the city is altogether a symbolical representation. It was an ancient Jewish belief, however, that they should be literally pearls of enormous size, 'each one thirty cubits in length, and of equal width.' The pearl was anciently much more rare than it is now, and was esteemed one of the most precious of all jewels, as in the words of our Lord: "The kingdom of heaven is as a merchant seeking goodly pearls; and, having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had and bought it (Mat. xiii. 45–46). Give not that which is holy unto dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine" (vii. 6). In like manner, these twelve pearl-gates, being set in the wall of the city, constituting an essential part of it, and its crowning beauty, represent the beauty, completeness, and preciousness of the great salvation which the wall symbolizes, and of the praise which goes forth from it. It has been mentioned before (402) that 'the city was pure gold like unto pure glass,' and here it is particularized that this is true even of its 'street,' i. e. its streets, with reference probably to their pavements, the transparency of which is also emphasized, to denote that the whole life of the church of the resurrection, down to its lowest elements, is most pure and precious, and that the light of the glory of God shines through it all.

22 And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof.

The temple at Jerusalem, as also the tabernacle in the

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wilderness, was the exclusive dwelling-place of God, where His glory was veiled in its Holy of Holies from the profane gaze of sinful men; none but the high-priest being allowed to look upon it, and that only once a year through a cloud of incense; where also God was worshipped with a prescribed ritual, which it was unlawful to use elsewhere. This may enable us to understand why there is no temple in the church of the resurrection; for in it there is no concealment of the divine presence and glory, no prescribed ritual of sacrifices, no ministry of an exclusive priesthood, no particular churches, no pastorates, no missionary organizations; these all having been superseded and done away by the immediate presence and all-pervading glory of God. The Lord God Almighty, the All-Ruler (22), and the Lamb that was slain in sacrifice, 'they are the temple thereof,' which denotes two things: (1) That as it was the temple in Jerusalem which made it the holy city, so it is the presence of God and the Lamb in the New Jerusalem which hallows it throughout; (2) that as all blessings came to the ancient church through her temple service, so do all blessings come to the church of the resurrection through the universal presence in her of God and the Lamb. And thus the following prophecies attain to their crowning fulfilment: "The hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. . . . When the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. . . .

> Thy people also shall be all righteous (Is. lx. 21).
> And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor,
> And every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord;
> For they shall all know me,
> From the least of them unto the greatest of them,
> Saith the Lord " (Jer. xxxi. 34).

23 And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it, for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof.

Thus also the prophet:

> The sun shall no more be thy light by day,
> Neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee;

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> But the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light,
> And thy God thy beauty (Is. lx. 19).

For the sun and moon, as we have seen, are symbols of the subordinate and mediate sources and supplies of intellectual, moral, and spiritual light (147), of which now there is no need, because 'God, who is light, and in Him is no darkness at all' (John i. 5), is the light of the city, and the Lamb is the lamp from which it shines in full manifestation and splendor. Thus we see that His most holy sacrifice is not a bare memory in the church of the resurrection, but that it illumines everything therein with the full blaze of the glory of God.

24 And the nations shall walk in the light thereof, and the kings of the earth do bring their glory into it.

In some manuscripts we have 'the nations of them that are saved,' but these last words are now rejected as a gloss by some transcriber to express more fully the true sense. Will there then be national organizations and governments in the resurrected and perfected state of humanity? There may be, but the words do not necessarily imply this; for here, and in other subsequent statements, the Seer seems to take a retrospective view of the nations as formerly hostile, and sees now that there is no more hostility, but complete universal reconciliation and consecration. The nations that were in enmity to the Lord and His church have all perished, and now the people that are saved, who formerly constituted nationalities and empires over which kings reigned, have their citizenship in the New Jerusalem, in whose light they walk, and into which they bring all their glory, in fulfilment of the prophecies:

> And nations shall come to thy light,
> And kings to the brightness of thy rising . . .
> And the sons of them that afflicted thee
> Shall come bending unto thee;
> And all they that despised thee
> Shall bow themselves at the soles of thy feet;
> And they shall call thee, The City of the Lord,
> The Zion of the Holy One of Israel (Is. lx. 3, 14).

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25 And the gates thereof shall not be shut at all by day, for there shall be no night there: 26 and they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.

In the Old Testament prophets the gates shall not be shut either by day or by night:

> Thy gates also shall be open continually;
> They shall not be shut by day or by night;
> That they may bring unto thee the forces of the nations,
> And their kings led [with them] (Is. lx. 11).

But here the imagery is varied again (404), in order to express the idea that 'there shall be no night there'; for the light of the city does not depend upon the sun, as rising and setting, but upon the constant presence and glory of God. This is to be understood in the sense that ignorance, unbelief, calamity, mourning, and death, of all which and of evil in general night is a Scriptural symbol, shall have no place in the Holy City (406). The retrospective glance seems also to recur to the Seer; in other words, he seems to see the open gates of the city by which the nations have been received into the estate of salvation, and by which they have brought their honor and glory into it, and at the same time to hear the ceaseless praise which their salvation calls forth (401).

27 And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or that worketh abomination, or a lie, but only they who have been written in the book of life of the Lamb.

The word here rendered 'unclean' literally means common, which is explained by the following: "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (Acts x. 15), or unclean. 'Abomination' includes all sins against nature, and a 'lie' is the practice of deceit for gain, or any other selfish object (396), and the holding of false doctrines concerning God and divine things. All who practice such iniquities have been cast into the lake of fire. They only have part in the city whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life (86).

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xxii. 1 And he showed me a river of the water of life, bright as crystal, coming forth out of the throne of God and the Lamb.

He who shows this is the angel of preceding visions, one of those who had the seven last plagues (397), to denote that, up to the very end, the connection between the divine judgments and the blessedness of the saved is to be borne in mind, as one of the great lessons of the book. Here the city of the saved is identified with the typical Paradise, once lost, but now regained in a transfigured and glorified state, or rather with that celestial Paradise into which our Lord received the penitent thief (Luke xxiii. 43), and into which St. Paul was caught up (2 Cor. xii. 4). For in this river there is an allusion to that which watered the garden of Eden (Gen. ii. 10). It is a 'river,' or flood, as the word is sometimes rendered, to denote the exhaustless abundance which it pours forth; it is the 'river of the water of life' because it is the symbol of life, especially of spiritual life; and its waters are 'bright as crystal,' to represent the purity and excellence of this life, perhaps also because it clearly reflects the heavenly light, for 'the life is the light of men' (John i. 4). It flows forth out of the throne of God and the Lamb, which is one throne (104), to signify that this life has its source in God (394), and more particularly in the divine sovereignty bestowing it upon whom He will (395), and in the Lamb who was slain in sacrifice for sin. Thus also the Psalmist:

> **With thee is the fountain of life;**
> **In thy light shall we see light (Ps. xxxvi. 9).**

Water as a symbol of life runs, as we have seen, through the whole Scripture (395), especially in the prophets, who speak of living waters flowing forth from the temple and sanctuary (Ez. xlvii. 1), but in this city there is no temple other than God and the Lamb (404); consequently this river of the water of life comes immediately from their throne. In the passage of Ezekiel just referred to, it is said: "He brought me and caused me to return to the brink of the river. . . . Then said he unto me, These waters issue forth toward the

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eastern region . . . into the sea . . . and the waters [of the sea] shall be healed [i. e. the nations shall be delivered from their sinful and stormy agitations] and everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh (391). . . . But the miry places thereof, and the marishes thereof, shall not be healed: they shall be given up to salt" (Ez. xlvii. 6–11). These places represent the world of spiritual evil without the city, the dwellings of the lost; and they are 'given up to salt' (Jer. xvii. 6), as ruined cities were sown with salt, to denote that they should remain a perpetual desolation (Judges ix. 46).

2 In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, bearing twelve [growths of] fruits, yielding the fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

This tree of life, which first appeared in the Paradise of man's innocence and happiness, where, however, we have only a glimpse of it, probably to denote the brevity of that blessed estate, reappears now in the Paradise regained, but how transfigured! For instead of being a single tree, as it was there, it has become a grove, stretching along on both banks of the river, whose course it follows through 'the street,' i. e. through the streets of the city: also, it bears twelve growths of fruits, one every month; in other words, it is a tree of perennial fruit-bearing; and even its leaves are for the healing of the nations. The prophet also describes it in words of the same import: "By the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that, shall grow every tree for food, whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit thereof fail; it shall bring forth first fruits every month, because the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary: and the fruit thereof shall be for food, and the leaf thereof for healing" (Ez. xlvii. 12). Beyond all question, this tree is the symbol of the word of God, as it was also in the garden of Eden; for the word of God is the food of man's spiritual nature, by which only does he live a spiritual life, as in the Lord's words, quoted from a preceding Scripture (Deut. viii.

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3): "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Mat. iv. 4). The tree grows on the banks of the river of the water of life, to signify that the life which it imparts it draws from that full stream which flows forth out of the throne of God and the Lamb. It bears twelve growths of fruits, to denote that it completely (109) supplies all man's spiritual wants, leaving nothing to desire; and it yields one growth every month, to signify that its fruitfulness is not affected by any change of season, but is perennial and inexhaustible, and that such is the word of God. But what is most significant of all is, that in this new Paradise there is no 'tree of the knowledge between good and evil' (Gen. ii. 9); for here man is no longer on probation, nor liable to fall from his holy and blessed estate, but stands confirmed forever in the grace that has saved him from all the consequences of his original sin of choosing by his own wisdom between good and evil.* In fine, 'the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations,' which, as leaves are only another form of what the tree bears, may be understood in the sense, that by the word of God the nations have been healed of their spiritual maladies, as in the prophecy just quoted, 'The waters [of the sea] shall be healed' (409). Here, however, the Seer evidently reverts to his retrospective view, for in the resurrection certainly there are no diseases to be healed.

3 And there shall be no more any cursed thing; and the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it; and His servants shall serve Him: 4 and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads: 5 and there shall be no more night, and they shall have no need of a lamp, or light of the sun; for the Lord God will shine upon them, and they shall reign forever and ever.

In this new Paradise 'there shall not be any accursed thing,' as there was in the former one, namely, the serpent, the tempter, for he has been cast into the lake of fire (376). But 'the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it,' which signifies that it will be under the immediate government of

* See *Wisdom of Holy Scripture*, xi. and xii.

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God in Christ, to whom the singular pronoun in the words, 'His servants shall serve Him,' refers; and their beatitude will consist in an ever active service (160). There is a pregnant meaning in the words, 'they shall see His face,' namely, that there will be no more concealment, but they shall behold His unveiled glory, which will fill them with the most perfect happiness; and that His image or likeness will be perfectly reflected and reproduced in them, as in the words: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God (Mat. v. 8). We all, beholding with unveiled face, as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Cor. iii. 18). Now are we the children of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, [but] we know that, when He shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John iii. 3). 'And His name shall be on their foreheads,' in allusion to the sealing of His servants, signifying that all their intellectual and spiritual faculties are consecrated to His service, and that they are His peculiar and inalienable possession (154). That there shall be no more night, and that they shall have no need of a lamp nor of the sun, because God Himself will be their light, are repeated in order that this blessed assurance may linger on their ear in the closing words of the vision (405). 'And they shall reign forever and ever,' over whom, or what? Perhaps this is to be taken in an indefinite sense, to express their exaltation, the highest degree of glory and happiness, as in the words of St. Paul to the Corinthian Christians: "I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you" (1 Cor. iv. 8); and perhaps its meaning is, that, in this glorified state, man will recover all that dominion over nature with which he seems to have been endowed at his creation, and which he lost in the fall.

Thus closes this grand vision of the New Jerusalem, in which are fulfilled the words of God, 'Behold, I make all things new.' As at the beginning, so at the end, there is an effulgence of glory, as when 'God said, Let there be light, and there was light.' The gloom and sorrow of the preced-

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ing judgments have now given place to the full realization of grace, mercy, and peace, and everlasting joy. For now 'the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them; and they shall be His peoples, and He will be God with them, their God (393); and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more; for the first things are passed away.' And how could the sentiments which all this was intended to awaken in our hearts be better expressed than in the following anonymous hymn?

Jerusalem, my happy home,
Name ever dear to me,
When shall my labors have an end
In joy and peace and thee?
When shall these eyes thy heaven built walls,
And pearly gates behold?
Thy bulwarks, with salvation strong,
And streets of shining gold?
O when, thou city of my God,
Shall I thy courts ascend,
Where congregations ne'er break up,
And Sabbaths have no end?
There happier bowers than Eden's bloom
Nor sin nor sorrow know:
Blest seats, through rude and stormy scenes
I onward press to you.
Why should I shrink at pain or woe,
Or feel at death dismay?
I've Canaan's goodly land in view,
And realms of endless day.
Apostles, martyrs, prophets there
Around my Saviour stand;
And soon my friends in Christ below
Will join the glorious band.
Jerusalem, my happy home,
My soul still pants for thee;
Then shall my labors have an end,
When I thy joys shall see.

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XLVIII

CONCLUSION ASSURANCES BLESSINGS INVITATIONS WARNINGS XXII 6–21

The brief conclusion of the book is wonderfully simple and sublime, consisting, for the most part, of the following particulars: (1) Assurances that these visions are a true revelation from God, and of such sanctity that whosoever shall add to, or take away from, its words shall suffer the plagues which are therein described: (2) that they who keep its instructions shall be forever blessed: (3) all are earnestly invited and urged to come and drink freely of the water of life which flows forth out of the throne of God and the Lamb: (4) the wicked shall surely perish: (5) the time of the Lord's coming, when all the prophecies shall be fulfilled, is near at hand: (6) a prayer that this time may be hastened, closing with (7) the apostolic benediction upon all the saints.

6 And he said unto me, These words are faithful and true; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, hath sent His angel to show unto His servants what things must shortly come to pass.

He who speaks here is the same angel that has shown to the Seer the glories of the New Jerusalem (397). The 'words' which he declares to be 'faithful and true' are the revelations of the whole book; which declaration he confirms by referring to the Lord who inspired the spirits of prophets in all their deliverances, as the same God who hath sent His angel to make these disclosures to His servants of things which must shortly come to pass. What the angel says is substantially the same with the first sentence of the book, where its meaning has been considered (2).

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7 And, behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he that keepeth the words of the prophecy of this book.

These are evidently the words of the Lord Himself, yet doubtless by the mouth of this angel representing Him; for nothing is more common in the ministry of angels than their speaking in the person of Him whom they represent. The nearness of the Lord's coming, here as elsewhere, must be understood with reference to the whole series of events which the expression covers (20), and in that large prophetic sense in which 'one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day' (2 Pet. iii. 8). The blessing of the introduction (10) is repeated at the close of the book for the sake of emphasis.

8 And I John am he that heard and saw these things: and when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things: 9 and he saith unto me, See [thou do it] not; I am a fellow-servant with thee, and with thy brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book: worship God.

The apostle here testifies again that he did actually see and hear the things which he describes (10). And hearing this angel speaking in the person of the Lord, and declaring that he will come quickly, he seems to mistake him for the Lord Himself, and falls down at his feet to worship him. But the angel hastens to admonish him that he is only a fellow servant with him, and with his brethren the prophets, and with those who keep the revelations of this book; wherein we see that these last are classed with prophets and angels, as an additional reason for the study and keeping of these prophecies (10). The incident is very like one that has occurred before, which shows us how prone we are to worship angels, and emphasizes the grand truth, that God only is to be worshipped (350).

10 And he saith unto me, Seal not the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. 11 He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is polluted, let him be polluted still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still.

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It was said to the prophet Daniel, that he 'should shut up the vision, for it should be for many days' (Dan. viii. 26); and the reason why these visions are not to be sealed up is, that 'the time is near'; for this makes it the more necessary that they shall be published, if they are to do any good. In a perfectly literal translation what follows would read, 'He that is unjust, let him do injustice still; and he that is polluted, let him pollute himself still; and he that is righteous, let him do righteousness still; and he that is holy, let him hallow himself still.' But the true sense seems to be better given in the freer rendering of our English Bible, which I have followed, except in one word. The four particulars mentioned are intended to include all mankind (114). The meaning is not, as some understand it, that the end is so near that there is no longer any opportunity for a change of character, or course of life, but rather that men are always forming their characters so that they cannot be changed, as some one has so tersely expressed it: "Sow an act, reap a habit; sow a habit, reap a character; sow a character, reap a destiny." 'In this immutable law the key of some of the darkest problems of the future may lie; and not without a solemn enunciation of this law does the book of Revelation close.' Daniel's visions also close in a similar manner: "Many will purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked will do wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but they that be wise will understand" (Dan. xii. 10).

12 Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render back to each one as his work is. 13 I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. 14 Blessed are they who wash their robes, that they may have a right to the tree of life, and may enter into the gates of the city. 15 Without are the dogs, and the sorcerers, and the fornicators, and the murderers, and the idolaters, and every one that loveth and maketh a lie.

The angel continues to speak in the person of the Lord, who always comes quickly, and always with His reward or recompense, as in the prophet:

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Behold, the Lord God will come as a mighty one,
And His arm shall rule for Him:
Behold, His reward is with Him,
And His recompense before Him (Is. xl. 10).

Here, however, the reference is to His coming in the judgment of the last day, when every one will be paid back according to his works (384). In affirming by His angel that He is 'the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end,' the Lord here claims absolute divinity, as in previous instances where these words are spoken by 'the Lord God' (394). The blessing here pronounced upon those 'who wash their robes,' i. e. in the blood of the Lamb (160), is that they shall 'have a right to the tree of life,' literally 'the authority over the tree,' and shall enter into the Golden City by its gates of praise (404); whilst 'without' the city, i. e. in the regions of the lost, all the incorrigibly immoral remain (409); among whom 'the dogs' correspond to 'the abominable' in a previous characterization of those who are cast into the lake of fire (396).

16 I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify these things unto you in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star. 17 And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come; and let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and let him that will take the water of life freely.

These are certainly the words of the Lord, but probably by the mouth of the angel who has spoken before in His person with such fulness of authority that the Seer has actually fallen down to worship him (414). Thus speaking through him, the Lord here declares that He has sent His angel to testify 'these things,' i. e. the revelations of the whole book, unto His servants in all the churches. Moreover, these revelations are from Him who has before been called 'the root of David' (119), to which 'offspring,' or race, is added here, both because He represented the tribe of Judah out of which David came, and descended lineally from him. The idea is analogous to that of His being both David's Lord and David's Son (Mat. xxii. 42–45). He is also 'the bright, the morning star,' which harbingers the eternal day, in allu-

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sion to 'the star that should rise out of Jacob' (Num. xxiv. 17), and to 'the day-star' of all man's aspirations and hopes (2 Pet. i. 19). And, now, at the close of all these admonitions and warnings, 'the Spirit and the Bride say, Come'; for the meaning of all the strivings of the Spirit, who 'maketh intercession for us with groanings that cannot be uttered,' and of all the ministry of the church, especially in causing the gospel to be preached to every creature, is this invitation to all men to come and take the water of life freely. 'And let him that heareth say, Come'; for the meaning of all the revelations of this book, and, indeed, of the whole gospel or word of God, is, Come take the water of life freely. Hence it is the duty and privilege of every one who hears and receives the word to re-echo this call of the Spirit and the Bride, that it may be heard throughout the world to the latest ages of time. 'And let him that is athirst come'; for the meaning of all those cravings and longings of the human soul, which nothing of an earthly or perishable nature can ever appease, is, Come, take the water of life freely: and 'whosoever shall drink of this water shall never thirst again' (John iv. 14). 'And let him that will take the water of life freely'; for salvation is absolutely free to all men, and none can fail of it for any other cause than that which is expressed in the Lord's words: "Ye will not come to me that ye may have life" (John v. 40). It has been fitly observed, also, that 'the whole power of the gospel concentrates itself in this, that we should be able to respond to this Come, and should repeat it from the heart'; for grace which does not make us the ministers of grace to others is no grace to us.

18 I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, if any man shall add unto them, God will add unto him the plagues which are written in this book: 19 and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life, and out of the Holy City, which are written in this book.

There is great diversity of opinion as to the speaker of these words. It is commonly understood that he is the Seer

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himself; and hence Luther discredited the whole book, regarding them as unworthy of the modesty of an apostle of the Lord. But this objection has no force, for Moses and other prophets use similar language; and, indeed, from their consciousness of being mouth-pieces of God, how could they avoid it? The following are examples: "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you (Deut. iv. 2). Every word of God is pure. . . . Add not thou unto His words, lest He reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. xxx. 5–6). But I see no reason why these words should not be those of the angel continuing to speak in the person of the Lord, especially since there is no intimation of any change from one speaker to another. Here, then, it is the Lord who testifies by the mouth of His angel, and testification is a solemn asseveration which binds those to whom it is addressed. By these words He impresses His own seal upon the Apocalypse, and warns us against handling it rashly or deceitfully; against allowing our own desires or preconceived opinions to govern our interpretations of it; against all attempts to weaken the force of its warnings, or to impoverish the riches of its promises. And one object of this warning was, no doubt, to guard the book from corruption, to preserve its integrity; for such is its fulness and completeness, as a divine revelation of the things concerning which it treats, that nothing can be added to or taken from it. Therefore he who shall attempt to do any of these things shall forfeit all right to the tree of life; God will take away his part out of the Holy City, and he shall be made to suffer all the plagues which are written in this book.

20 He who testifieth these things saith, Yea, I come quickly. Amen, come, Lord Jesus.

The things to which He thus solemnly testifies are all the revelations of the book, upon which He has just impressed His seal, and of which His coming is the theme (16). Hence it closes, as it opens, with the assurance that He will come

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